FINDING THE HUMAN: HIDDEN DISABILITIES IN STAR TREK

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I explore depictions of characters in *Star Trek (ST)* media that question what it means to be human and how those depictions match narratives in disability studies. While criticism has explored both liberal and conservative depictions of various disenfranchised groups in *ST*, very little has focused on characters with disabilities, and even less on those with hidden disabilities. Thus, this thesis aims to explore a media touchstone and place it within the larger conversation of rhetoric, identity, and disability. Chapter I is an introduction to *ST* itself, to disability studies, and the scholarship surrounding both before establishing the characters and arguments that will be discussed. In Chapter II, I focus on Data from *Star Trek: The Next Generation (TNG)* to examine the depiction of his mental state and the comparisons drawn between him and Spock from the Original Series. This allows a discussion of the accurate and inaccurate depictions of neuroqueerness and how that impacts a watching audience. In Chapter III, I focus on the EMH from *Star Trek:Voyager (VOY)* to examine the unique struggles he faces through lack of accessibility and how these struggles affect his own mental state and the people around him. Using Donna Reeves' concept, I examine the effects of psycho-emotional disablism on EMH. In Chapter IV, I examine Julian Bashir from *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (DS9)* to show the era's ideas and understanding of disability and the cure narrative so entrenched in disability studies and medical knowledge. This allows a complication of the either/or view of *ST* as entirely liberal or conservative in its depictions of the Other and of the medical/curative understanding of disability that it was commenting on during the events of its era. This thesis concludes that *ST's*

writing pushed the bounds of what was known and accepted, contributing to its lasting

power in the public consciousness and scratching the surface of how the humanities

and popular media have influenced each other, and society, despite being generally

ignored in scholarship as unimportant.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

When I was growing up watching and reading *Star Trek* wherever I could and absorbing the famous goal "to boldly go where no one has gone before," I dreamed of the day that I would have my chance to do something important or help others after me; however, I never thought that it would involve writing about *Star Trek* itself. James Broderick argues, "*Star Trek* IS literature… as Trekkers and casual observers continue to be drawn to *Star Trek* for the same reason one seeks the satisfactions of literature--to discover the depth and complexity of our own world, to help find one's place in the universe" (5). Thus, this thesis will look at the series as both text and cultural artifact. Examining the *Star Trek* series as text allows me to examine power relationships within society and culture, including issues relating to disability.

Science fiction is becoming well known for the insights it actually provides into any and all topics, ranging from the public to private, the body to the mind, the past to the future, and much more; truly they have proven their place as much more than simple mindless stories for entertainment, bridging the gap between the average individual and the theoretical/philosophical ideas inside in a way little else can, with the many series of *Star Trek* reigning supreme as both forerunner and paragon of these qualities in the realms of American media and science fiction television.

One needs only look at the fact that various series, books, and movies set in the *Star Trek* future (not to mention spin offs) have run from 1966, the date the original series started, to today with *Discovery* and *Picard* on going, to see that *something* clearly has captured the minds of millions. The ideas and vocabulary that Rodenberry's original series created are now part of the public consciousness, and scientific advancements are made thanks to inspiration from the show, with examples

including transporters/teleporters, holograms, tricorders, laser scalpels, automated surgical machines, and more.

But *Star Trek*'s main draw to fame, and speculative fiction's draw in general, is the reflection they still manage to give of the contemporary society watching it, no matter how far in the future or past the particular episode happens to be set. "One reason why *Star Trek* has endured from one generation to the next is that most of the stories themselves are indeed moral fables" explains Judith Barad and Ed Robertson in the introduction to their book *The Ethics of Star Trek*, and continue by adding that "when taken as a whole they constitute a harmonious philosophy filled with hope" (xi). In fact, *Star Trek* overall remains as possible the most hopeful future imagined for humanity, as it attempts to show time and again that it is possible to work past problems, biases, and more and quite literally reach for the stars. It is by no means perfect. of course, beholden as it is to the society that writes it and the producers or sponsors that may be more interested in money or views than in some of the more delicate or difficult topics, but that hasn't stopped media ranging from just about every debate possible to be created over the more than 50 years of existence: articles, classes, books, entire movements created around the franchise, and communities/groups formed through connection to the ideals and characters. In fact, Mia Consalvo argues that *Star Trek* is particularly effective for this type of analysis because of its mass cultural appeal (181).

There is no doubt that *Star Trek* and its related series have been influential in our culture. Fifty-five years of success, with 8 series (3 currently running), 13 movies, and hundreds of novels, not to mention the conventions and fan clubs, illustrate the cultural significance of *Star Trek*. The fact that there was not one but two campaigns to save *Star Trek*, one after season 1 and one after season 2, in which fans

and science fiction writers alike wrote in letters to show their love and dedication for the show and its characters illustrates the importance of the series as so much more than "situation comedy in space suits" (Solow and Justman 299). The fascination with the show spurred a young crowd of college and university students to protest and hold demonstrations outside NBC offices in both California and New York (382) to save the show, which demonstrates just what kind of impact *Star Trek* made in its brief three years. The popularity of the show and the cultural obsession with it and its ideas make it perfect for examining identities and power relationships. In fact, Mia Consalvo claims that examining popular culture texts enables us to discover the ideologies embedded in the show and thus gain an understanding of our current social and cultural power structures (182).

From the beginning the series was described as a show that attempted to go beyond pure entertainment. Describing the original show in a programming booklet, NBC stated,

> [I]n the manner of every successful piece of speculative fiction from the classics of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and Aldous Huxley to the work of such current masters of the art as Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov and Kingsley Amis, the STAR TREK storylines will stimulate the imagination without bypassing the intellect. While speculating in a fascinating way about the future, the series also will have much to say that is meaningful to us today. (NBC Pamphlet)

While the show clearly aimed to engage both with the future and philosophical ideas, it also attempted to comment on the society of the time. Herbert "Herb" F. Solow, who along with Gene Roddenberry, helped develop and produce the original *Star Trek* makes it clear that "first and foremost, *Star Trek* was not created or developed as a critical study of truth, life's fundamental principles, or concepts of

reasoned doctrines. We just wanted a hit series" (Solow and Justman 431). Yet he also acknowledges that "the basic *Star Trek* philosophy" developed initially later became altered through the cultural interaction and audience analysis. He describes how "a profound and metaphysical overlay was superimposed over the years as popularity begat popularity and viewers saw and defined a subjective something that validated and increased their appreciation of the show" and "that so many fans saw, and continue to see, so much more in *Star Trek* than we ever realized was there" (431). It seems telling, then, that somewhere caught up in what it took to make a popular series and what it took to make science fiction, sprung a show that had one of, if not the biggest, impact on television history (311) and made it a cultural phenomenon that continued after its cancellation with the strength of its reruns (418).

But there were very real comments being made through the show of current events when it aired in December of 1966. The times were turbulent with the social disruptions of the Civil Rights Movement and the growing quagmire in Vietnam. In this growing time of uncertainty, *Star Trek* used its stories situated in the future to comment on the changing roles and historical events challenging the cultural hegemony, such as "the growing "police action" in Vietnam" (Solow and Justman 356) in one episode and another episode that was "roundly criticized by some for being a heavy-handed attempt to preach" about racism that "nevertheless… made a valid point with viewers" (400). Gene Roddenberry pushed for a wildly multicultural crew that he hoped would "show that people with opposing philosophies not only could learn to get along, but could in fact set aside their differences and cooperate to bring about a better future for humankind" (343). While there was a limit to how much he could push for in the political climate of the late 60s, the late 80s and early 90s allowed for more political and creative freedom to be taken with the show's

premises and scripts, as did the power of the now household name *Star Trek*, which let Roddenberry send episodes directly to tv stations instead of going through network producers and dealing with censorship (TNG Bible 4).

As new series in the *Star Trek* franchise were developed, they continued to grapple with a changing society and cultural ideologies. During these years, society saw women's increasing presence in and demand for work and equal rights, racial tensions flaring that highlighted the still remaining inequality of ethnic groups, LGBT+ groups pushing for equal rights, and disabled people trying for the same with the ADA passed in 1990. Technological improvements in the meantime would expand science's understanding of the world we live in, the solar system, as well as our own bodies and genetics, leading to genetic engineering, designer babies, and cloning becoming actual realities for the first time and not just science fiction. Technology would also allow a level of connectedness through computers, satellites, phones, and finally the internet, that was hitherto unthinkable for society, and propelled the sharing of news, ideas, and movements to new heights by the end of the 20th century.

The Next Generation (*TNG*), as the closest to the original series both temporally and formulaically, would touch on many of these topics in various episodes. It often tried to both demonstrate and inspire the highest possibilities of humanity, something especially clear with the framing of Q's 'Trial of Humanity' in the first and last episode, as well as throughout. While all of the Starfleet characters are meant to embody the highest values of humanity, Data, the android, becomes the most visible focal point of these questions and beliefs.

Deep Space 9 (*DS9*) meanwhile, shifted the format to one more focused on the darker aspects of humanity and civilization in general. Starting with the aftermath of the first Borg conflicts and leading into an entire socio-political period of unrest and

unease between civilizations trying to recover from a very long and brutal occupation, the series then entered another period of war with a civilization of shapeshifters and genetically altered and cloned warriors dependent on those shapeshifters. Julian Bashir is revealed to be genetically modified as this war first erupts, linking him to both Khan of the original *Star Trek* series and the Jem'Hadar or Vorta of *DS9*'s own era. His presence echoes the fears erupting in the American society of the time of the show's airing, as these technologies are becoming a reality.

Voyager (*VOY*) changes the format again by catapulting the crew into an entirely different quadrant of the galaxy, leaving them suddenly disconnected from their hyper-connected society, without resources, help, or even understanding of the area they find themselves in, and hoping to make it home before they all die of old age. On top of this juxtaposition of their situation and the increasingly connected reality of the 90s, *Voyager*'s largest and continuous adversary is that of the Borg, a technologically and physiologically assimilationist species seeking oneness and perfection, with thought of little else. In this series, we are introduced to the EMH, short for the Emergency Medical Hologram. The EMH then becomes an incredibly interesting character as a walking and talking encyclopedic computer program of all Starfleet medical knowledge, without anything to actually connect to, in a series that seems to both embrace and reject the combining of flesh and machine in an echoing of the hopes and fears of science's rapid advancement.

All three of these characters, while embodying important aspects and critiques of many concurrent issues during their respective shows running, will be my focus specifically through the lens of disability studies. This is because, while there are definitely a great many important developments and topics that deserve their own studies during the initial run of these series, one of the largest was undoubtedly the

passing of the ADA. Yet there is still a large hole in academic and public discourse in general about disability when compared to many other marginalized groups, especially when it comes to hidden disabilities like those of mental illnesses and genetic or otherwise internal differences.

Though it might seem strange that two of the three characters to be discussed aren't biologically human, that very status often made them the perfect characters to use to study humanity. As the co-creator and executive producer of *Voyager* explained, they "saw the Doctor as following in the footsteps of characters like Spock and Data: an outsider who explores what it means to be human. We created the Doctor with that function in mind. We had been through enough incarnations of that to know that it works as a mirror for humankind" (*ST:Voy Companion* 105). Additionally, their status as visibly and invisibly 'outsider' characters further allows them to mirror society's 'outsiders', allowing both visibly and invisibly othered people to identify strongly with the characters in ways that closely aligns with the fluidity now being understood to be central to the experience and study of disability.

The world and *Star Trek* have both changed drastically since the 1960s of the original series, but one thing that hasn't changed--the show offered a "rare… contribution of that kind of entertainment… [with] dualities of meaning, so that there were stories that could be told with significance and yet be entertaining" (7). This acknowledgment of *Star Trek*'s depth has resulted in an outpouring of articles, essays, collections, and books over themes, influences, and messages in *Star Trek* over the years, but still more work remains in relatively newer or changing fields, such as disability studies. This thesis aims to contribute to this work by building on previous research into *Star Trek*'s exploration of power dynamics and identities, as well as the latest critical thoughts in disability studies, to explore how characters who can be read

as disabled have become some of the only, and certainly some of the most successful, representations of disability available in popular media through the late 80s and 90s. *Star Trek*, as the huge cultural titan that it is, has become an important cultural touchstone that provides representation in media to people who have previously been denied such or been ignored by having characters that are read as being disabled. These stories of characters with hidden disabilities provide a counter narrative to the American mythos of disability.

American Mythos

From the first pitch for what would become *Star Trek*, Roddenberry described it as "like *Wagon Train* to the stars" (Solow and Justman 15). It's no wonder then that critics have found much to examine in the series' borrowing of common stories and myths, to the point of solidifying the show as maker of Modern American cultural myths.

Jon Wagner and Jan Lunden's book *Deep Space and Sacred Time: Star Trek in the American Mythos* examines these myths, as the title suggests, connecting the ideas of race and imperialism to the hold the show and modern American culture had on each other. In pointing out the lack of language available to try to describe "anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with 'Other' cultures" (qtd *Orientalism* Said), the authors show *Star Trek*'s language as primarily American-style imperialism, better known in the cultural consciousness as the frontier or Wild West. *Star Trek* is positioned as a show that lets people "imagine themselves as rugged pioneers, exemplars of anti-authoritarian individualism and resourceful self-reliance… to be the champions of the underdog, the harbingers of freedom for all, and the nemesis of effete aristocrats, pompous elitists, powerful bosses, and privileged exploiters of all sorts" (175). This mythology is able to hide or erase the

"contradiction between conquest and human equality" by imagining the frontier as "unknown, unowned, and of little benefit to humankind until it is turned from a forbidding wilderness into a productive garden.…If the land at the frontier belongs to no one, it cannot be stolen" (175). The authors show how this unassuming mythos pervades the various *Star Trek* series, and despite the veneer of individualism and anti-colonialism, the series actually uses the same vocabulary, leaving it up to the audience to try and reconcile the attitudes and what they mean for the future.

Lincoln Geraghty, a scholar who has delved many times into *Star Trek* and science fiction, in his book *Living with Star Trek: American Culture and the Star Trek Universe* discusses the use of history and myth in *Star Trek* to show how fans "talk about and use the themes of utopia, community, and self improvement… as representing a utopian future that exists in contrast to the dystopian future to which existing social problems will lead… [and] to help cope with traumatic experiences in their lives" (14). He suggests the very real and important effects of the stories we tell to ourselves and each other. By comparing these responses that highlight both the individual and communal aspect of such mythmaking and storytelling, he emphasizes the power of *Star Trek* to work against "the decline of community in America" (14) as suggested by those like Robert Putnam and Robert Wuthnow. Geraghty argues that by tapping into these common myths, *Star Trek*, and the people who watch it, are given a voice and common ground to begin the important work of relating to each other and themselves.

The book *Star Trek as Myth*, edited by Matthew Kapell, collects various essays on the topic to show that the 1960s show "latched on to a mythical zeitgeist and quickly grew beyond itself… take[ing] mythic journeys as old as *The Odyssey* and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, [and] combin[ing] them with newer mythic narratives of

the American Frontier and the very contemporary notion of cultural assimilation [to] make something at once both old and new" (Kapell 14). Kapell demonstrates how myth works to help individuals and society make sense of their experiences. Finally, he quotes Q in the final episode of *TNG*, a quote that sums up the role of the *Star Trek* series and its mythos by exclaiming that the role of myth is "to expand your mind and your horizons… [to be] open to options you had never considered. That is the exploration that awaits you. Not mapping stars and studying nebulae, but charting the unknown possibilities of existence" (14). In this way, Kapell argues that *Star Trek*'s entire purpose and hope, its mythos, is this exploration that it inspires in its audience, building on work to demonstrate not only the series' continuing cultural importance, but the importance of current culture on the series. This thesis will examine the mythos surrounding an area unexplored in *Star Trek* scholarship: the mythos surrounding disability.

Disability Studies is an area of scholarship that fills in important gaps in *Star Trek* scholarship. While scholarship on the series has looked at other marginal groups by looking at issues of race, gender, and imperialism, much still needs to be explored around disability and *Star Trek*. Disability Studies questions the assumptions often made in reference to those with disabilities and the disabilities themselves, drawing attention to how "ableist understandings of disability are taken as common sense" (Kafer 10), and the damage done through this rhetoric. With disability itself something largely detested or ignored in society and scholarship and with new theories that examine both the social and medical theories that dominate what talk *does* exist of disability, not to mention new attention beginning to be directed to mental and hidden disabilities, it seems prudent to look at one of the largest cultural phenomena in entertainment for what it can teach us about our own beliefs on self and

disability through the past and future. *Star Trek* by no means avoided the topic, but its labeled or outwardly disabled characters often fall into what critics describe as problematic tropes or are shown as having technologies that allow them to function as non-disabled, such as Melora and Geordi (Kanar 250). While this belief is problematic in its own right, the fact remains that most attention and criticism has been directed at the individuals with visible disabilities. It's the characters not listed as disabled at all, who are even seen as superhuman in the show, but end up registering as disabled all the same when examined through a Disability Studies lens that this thesis is interested in exploring. The ideas of Disability Studies can help us see a more nuanced view of disability and people with disabilities, as the show began right as the ADA was passed and discourse on disabilities had begun to enter the American consciousness.

Disability Overview

Disability studies is both an ancient and new addition to scholarly pursuits: old thanks to the existence of disability in literature stretching back to the existence of records and new thanks to new perspectives recognizing disability as socially constructed like most power structures, created in the collision between societal expectations and the reality of the human condition. Put simply, *everyone* will either know someone who is, or will be, disabled at some point in their life, be it due to injury, illness, genetics, or the gradual effects of age. Yet society as a whole ignores this at best, and blames this on personal failure at worst, as it creates a world that caters to one, homogeneous, fictional existence. Bodies that do not conform to the social norms are seen as "sick, deformed, crazy, ugly, old, maimed, afflicted, mad, abnormal, or debilitated" (Garland-Thompson 5). Disability Studies challenges this idea by demonstrating this view as a cultural myth reinforcing ableist norms.

Disability Studies also began recognition of 'invisible disabilities': those of chronic illness, chronic pain, mental illnesses, genetics, and more. These people don't fit the socially created image of the disabled (often a physical lack of some sort, especially one that needs a wheelchair), and as such end up shamed, dismissed, accused of lying, and more. The fact that the sign most often used to denote disabled accessible spaces is that of a wheelchair just further demonstrates this cultural assumption. Even those who *do* require physical aids, such as wheelchairs, may not require them *constantly*, as disability and the body itself is increasingly understood as its own spectrum. Just as every person exists in a range that is humanity and not as one mold that every person fits into, all individual's capabilities and struggles exist in their own range that can change from hour to hour and day to day.

Overview of Criticism

This thesis will be concerned with three specific ideas emanating from Disability Studies, specifically in invisible disabilities: views on neurodivergence, psycho-emotional disablism specifically from lack of access, and challenges to the cure/medical narrative seen in the curative imaginary.

Scholars have often viewed Data as autistic or neurodivergent, including Chaya Porter, Rachel Groner, and Shaun Bryan Ford. Therefore, it is important to look at how disability studies discuss neurodivergence. Neurodivergence is perhaps one of the trickiest disabilities to define, not least of which because even the 'standard' mind is unknown and unknowable to medicine and philosophy alike despite their best attempts. To ascribe some sort of 'otherness' to certain modes or patterns of thought, then, especially in an effort to claim one as more 'valid' than another, carries a whole host of issues that disability studies, and especially those focused on autism, examine closely. Two main concepts about neurodivergence that

are questioned in disability studies are the idea that autistic people "fail to understand that other people have a mind or that they themselves have a mind" (Empirical Failures 102) and the idea that they have an empathy deficit. Christina Nicolaidis points out that a lack of empathy has been a descriptor and diagnosis 'checkmark' since 1962 and points out that autistic individuals argue that "purported deficits in cognitive empathy… may be due to a breakdown in mutual understanding between people who experience the world differently (and may apply just as much to neurotypical people failing to empathize with autistic people as it does in the opposite direction)" (4). Questioning the autistic individual's ability to feel for others can be dehumanizing and perpetuate these "dangerous stereotypes and oversimplifications" (4). Thus, disability studies calls for a rethinking of neurodivergence not as a disability but as an alternate way of seeing the world, especially clear in M. Remi Yergeau's work as they lay out the tactics of demi-rhetoricity that denies neurodivergent individuals power over their own minds, futures, and stories (32). It is this idea that I will apply to my analysis of the character of Data.

It is exactly this way of seeing disability through a medical model that I will be arguing against in my examination of EMH. The 'social model of disability' contrasts with the medical model of disability by no longer seeing someone with a disability as needing to be fixed or cured. This model works to challenge the medical/deficit model of disability that focuses on lack or abnormalities that have to be fixed, and "has been the main model of the last few centuries and the medical profession was (and still is) based on 'curing' people" (Alexander-Passe 272). It instead argues that disability should be viewed through a lens of an interaction between the individual and the environment. Thus, society needs to change in order to enable people with disabilities to participate in society. While "society is now slowly

moving towards [inclusivity],... many workplaces are still not inclusive to all" (272). The unfortunate fact of the matter is that this will likely never be a binary right/wrong scenario. To completely deny the medical model is to deny agency to people who can make choices on how they want to live or improve themselves, as well as the progress in technology and understanding that allows lives to be saved when they otherwise may have been cut short, but to completely accept it is to accept the atrocities carried out again and again for the sake of some unattainable ideal of normality by ridding people and the world of differences, giving rise to those like Dr. Mengele. This is why the social model was formed and why it continues to be developed today, but while these ideas have had time to be fully fleshed out within these past years, during the creation of *Star Trek* they were brand new or not even created yet.

Donna Reeve's look at psycho-emotional aspects of disability started with critiques of the social model of disability as being too restrictive, as it "ignores the cultural and experiential dimensions of disability… at the expense of the more 'personal' experiences of oppression which operate at the emotional level" ("Psycho-emotional dimensions of disability" 84). Reeve's continued works make this psycho-emotional extension of the social model of disability her focus, drawing on all types of criticism and commentary in order to make explicit the important effects *being* disabled in our society has on a person's emotional and internal self. She specifically uses the term 'disablism' instead of 'disability' to "make explicit connections with other forms of social oppression such as racism and sexism". The combination and extension of the social model of disability with the psycho-emotional "offers a framework for a more nuanced understanding of the lived experience of disablism in contemporary society" (Psycho-emotional Disablism 123).

Specifically, Reeve argues that people with disabilities face exclusion from the community, a silencing of their voices, dismissal of their humanity, and a lack of acknowledgement of their sexuality. There is both direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism, with direct "emerg[ing] from the relationship that a disabled person has with other people or themselves" and indirect "aris[ing] from the experience of structural disablism" (Psycho-emotional Disablism 124). Not only is it important to note these two vectors for a more nuanced view of the disabled experience, but it's doubly important to note that these can be from "often unwitting agents" and the very attempt to remove structural barriers, that end up recreating the "identical outcome of excluding the disabled person" (124). As such, it can be incredibly difficult to find validation for one's feelings of exclusion and self-loathing in these circumstances, making media representation of these moments and feelings all the more important to take note of and study. Thus, I will look at the specific ways that EMH faces disablism.

Finally, in my analysis of Julian Bashir, I will offer a complication of the cure narrative that often dominates fictional accounts of disability. The cure narrative assumes that disability must be fixed or cured and that the person with disabilities is heroic when they overcome the disability. Therefore, we imagine the future in science fiction as a world without disability. As Alison Kafer expertly states in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, however, no matter if a person has a disability or not, and no matter if a person sees a potential positive future for individuals with disability or not, all of these understandings and imaginings of a disabled person's future are actually rooted in the present. "One's assumptions about the experience of disability create one's conception of a better future" (Kafer 2), and a great many people assume and imagine disability as "a terrible unending tragedy" (2). Entire imagined futures are written off

because of the assumption that merely the presence of a disability "is a future no one wants… [and] that anyone who feels otherwise is 'crazy'" (3). By arguing that disability actually has a political nature and that it has been cast as a "monolithic fact of the body, as beyond the realm of the political and therefore beyond the realm of debate or dissent" lets Kafer pick apart the argument that "we all desire the same futures" and to show others that "the value of a future that includes disabled people goes unrecognized" (3). She shows how these assumptions are born from ableist perspectives and that through the framework of politics, and specifically the politics of crip futurity, that we can think of "these imagined futures-and hence, these lived presents-differently" (3).

She also, however, acknowledges the fact that there is often truth to the claim that people don't want a disabled future, which she realizes is "marked by an ableist failure of imagination" but continues that she "can't deny holding it" (Kafer 4). The problem arises when the desire for health care and the basic fulfillments of human needs turns into the cutting out of and erasing illness and disability as part of the human condition. The tipping point between those two states of mind, and the biases held about what is considered normal or deviant, is what needs to be studied and critiqued. Science fiction then, a place full of imagined futures and disabled characters "even if they aren't referred to as disabled within the narratives themselves" (20) becomes one key place I believe can be studied for society's anxieties over this integral part of our own existence. Julian Bashir's story that goes above and beyond this, to question its own place in the curative imaginary before such a term was even coined, especially deserves study.

This refusal to see individuals with disabilities in a 'good' future, or imagine such people as having 'good' futures themselves, is also another piece of the overall

treatment of those same individuals as 'monstrous' or 'inhuman' somehow. I believe this plays particularly well with the 'inhuman' characters I've specifically chosen, both because these characters were already designed to question humanity from a sort of outside perspective and because they are each 'proven', to the extent that such a vague topic can be proven, to retain 'human' status among their crews.

Chapter 1 - Data Overview

Data, a synthetic humanoid or android, is one of the best-known characters of the 'next generation' of *Star Trek* series,' which included the one he was in, *The Next Generation*, as well as *Deep Space 9*, and *Voyager*. His unnaturally golden-pale skin and yellow eyes visibly others him from his crewmates, while his stiff and formal mannerisms and manner of speaking invisibly others him in much the same way. Both served to link him as a sort of spiritual successor to Spock, tapping into the same outsider perspective that hoped to learn about humanity, and by so doing ask introspective questions that forced the audience to consider harder topics.

As such, he's one of the most discussed *Star Trek* characters in critical work, which makes him an especially good character to begin my own analysis with. Much less has been done on Data's mannerisms and supposed mental state specifically, providing a space to center both *Star Trek* and disability studies into, providing a possible glimpse at one of the reasons for his immense popularity, as well as a look at the rhetoric (following in Yergeau's steps) surrounding neurodivergences that existed then and how it differs, or doesn't differ, from today.

Chapter 2 - EMH Overview

Star Trek: Voyager's EMH, or Emergency Medical Hologram, is synthetic, but realistically exists in a space somewhat between someone like Data and his own biologically human crewmates. Though the Doctor had encyclopedic knowledge of all

available medical science at the time of his creation, he otherwise started as a near perfect copy of his creator/programmer visually and mentally. As a character also conceived to be able to ask questions of humanity and our assumptions, this 'other' status makes sense. However, it's impossible to tell the difference between the Doctor and another human unless his power or the computer begins malfunctioning.

In this sense, his status matches that of individuals with hidden or invisible disabilities: those whom you might see parking in a reserved space, only to have some self-righteous other individual declare they're not allowed to use that space because they either 'can't be disabled' or they're 'not disabled enough'. Likewise, the EMH provides a perfect space to question society's assumptions about disabilities, especially those with no visual accompaniment, as well as the very real effects that go beyond whatever the individual might be dealing with thanks to those assumptions, following in the steps of Donna Reeve's work in studying the effects of psycho-emotional disablism.

Chapter 3 - Bashir Overview

Finally, *Star Trek: Deep Space 9*'s Julian Bashir is biologically human, but was genetically enhanced as a child in an attempt by his parents to cure him of some unspecified mental illness. As this procedure was done illegally, he had to grow up 'in the closet' so to speak, staying hypervigilant in order to avoid suspicion from either his success or his other neurodivergent habits. This is found out eventually, and he is kept from punishment, however it becomes clear that he both hates his parents' actions and views himself as something 'other' like a monster or freak.

Due to this, Bashir's character is an incredibly unique chance to acknowledge the harmful effects that lack of agency, constant self-monitoring and censorship, and the cure mentality as a whole can have, as well as question why these exist. He both is

and isn't an individual with a disability, shown both thriving and struggling in this imagined future, and seems to both believe in and not believe in the cure narrative he was subjected to, allowing a complicated space for the audience to begin chipping away at their own preconceived notions.

CHAPTER II

He's the Tin Man, Not Pinocchio, and he has a Heart: Data and Theory of Mind

Data is likely one of the best-known characters in all the *Star Trek* series, especially as he is clearly paralleled with Spock from the original series. As an android, Data is visibly othered with golden-pale skin and yellow eyes, but he is also othered by his words and mannerisms: specifically, his formal, almost stiff manner of speaking, constant references to a lack of emotions, and his computer-like memory and information processing skills. In most of the critical work on *Star Trek*, Data is often the character featured or mentioned in the scholarship, and these traits come to the forefront no matter what is being looked at or what theory is being used, though they tend to focus on his 'otherness' as commentary on broader human issues.

Chaya Porter, in her thesis on gender, race, sexuality, and disability in *Star Trek* provides a "reading of Data as autistic/disabled" though this reading must be qualified "in the context of a frequently ableist cultural lens" (80) as *Star Trek* unfortunately is both a product of the time in which it was written and a product of society's larger feelings of shame, disgust, and denial on disability overall (especially autism or other neurodivergences). As Chaya briefly describes, "while Data's incredible cognitive abilities frequently rescue his crew from certain doom, Data's struggle with and yearning for complex emotional experiences often render his unique affect as 'disabled'" (80). It is this view of Data as disabled that I will examine in this chapter.

Interestingly, it should be noted that Data's lack of an emotion chip was done on purpose. His creator/father worried Data would 'malfunction' like his older brother Lore, an identical android with emotions built in already when he was activated, but who showed too much emotional instability, either naturally or in response to humans

envying and fearing him, and so was deactivated at their behest. So, Data is created

without emotions (or at least most of them, as a complete lack can be debated) with

the intention of adding them later once Data has a stable understanding of right and

wrong and the experiences of dealing with others that would allow him to be trusted

to handle his emotions responsibly, especially given his other superhuman traits.

While it is purposefully done in an attempt to allow Data to grow into a 'better' being

in the end and is stated to have been a temporary design, the fact remains that he is

purposefully disabled/altered before 'birth' in a way that results in a very familiar, if

unrecognized at the time, disabling mental illness. His disability serves as unfortunate

comic relief, character motivation and development, and the very trait that saves

entire civilizations of lives several times over.

Data's disability seems to serve him and his crew much better than a

traditionally neurotypical person/android might have. Traditionally, in science fiction

the disabled character is described as a "supercrip." The supercrip is shown as heroic

by overcoming the disability. However, as Josefine Wälivaara states in "Blind

Warriors, Supercrips, and Techno-Marvels: Challenging Depictions of Disability in

Star Wars," "By focusing on individual achievements, either mundane tasks or

extreme feats such as climbing a mountain, the supercrip implies that effort and

willpower of the individual is all that is needed for people with disabilities to

overcome obstacles in life" (1038). Data, at first glance, runs a high risk of falling into

this exact trope, as his most stated desire seems to be to transcend his own limits and

be more like a human than a machine. However, no matter the amount of willpower

and effort Data puts into overcoming this disability, he does not. In the show, he never

uses the emotion chip and instead seems to develop his own type and style of 'feeling'

that is not only recognizable to the audience as emotions but is referenced or

commented on by the other characters themselves as being much closer to a typical

human's emotional state than he ever seems aware of. He's always just 'off' in some

way, for better or worse, but the crew accepts him anyway.

For example, during the episode "Hollow Pursuits," two scenes immediately

jump out as examples of a failure of Data's Theory of Mind to fully match up with his

crewmates, however the writing still twists it slightly. The first occurs as a few

characters are discussing another, Lieutenant Barclai, but with the nickname of

'Broccoli'. Data questions this, asking "Pardon me, but why is Lieutenant Barclay

being referred to clandestinely as a vegetable?" (15), which seems to be another case

of Data simply not understanding human behaviors. As another character explains that

it's just a nickname, however, Data notes that "Nicknames generally denote fondness,

a diminutive shared between friends. This does not sound friendly." with the script

continuing on the side that "He's got them there" and the other characters "look a

little uncomfortable" (16).

The second occurs much later, as Captain Picard makes the unfortunate slip of

calling Barclai 'Broccoli' to his face by accident, causing a "A brief, poisonous

silence" before the Lieutenant:

> moves quickly to the turbolift, EXITS. A beat.
> Then Data offers...
>
> <div align="center">DATA</div>
>
> <div align="center">Metathesis is one of the most
> common of pronunciation errors,
> sir... a reversal of vowel and
> consonant, "bark" to "broc"...</div>
>
> A sharp look from Picard shuts him up. ("Hollow Pursuits" 20)

Interestingly, while both of these scenes are used somewhat humorously as examples

where Data doesn't quite 'understand' humanity, aka has a lacking Theory of Mind in

some manner, both scenes also suggest that Data *does* understand other individuals'
internal mental states and is seeking to help in some way, both by calling attention to
negative behavior and by trying to conciliate the captain after his mistake. While a
small example, and only one of many I will additionally make later, it is this twisting
of expectations and rhetoric that create questions for his character and portrayal that
made him such a draw for audiences then and now.

In a genre that seems as "obsessed with disability as it is with space travel and
alien contact" but which usually revolves "around the concept of cure or fetishization
of prosthesis and other adaptive technologies" (Allan and Cheyne 390), it is important
to find and point out the texts that seem to resist this and show alternate ideas. *Star
Trek: The Next Generation (TNG)* , though at times reinforcing the supercrip
storyline, subverts it through the story projection of Data, his overwhelming
acceptance by the crew, and ability to, eventually, tell his own story. Data is
especially important as he is the character the show uses to question what it means to
be human. In this chapter, I will argue that Data's character arc, by not following the
'supercrip' narrative or the developing computer geek/savant narrative, offers a proto
example of the queering of humanity, agency, and rhetoric that exists through
neuroqueer lives and narratives today, as laid out by Yergeau.

One of the biggest issues with trying to write about a character, what their
neurodivergence might be or at least what others identify with about them and so on,
especially when it comes to autism, is that it runs the risk of becoming something that
Remi Yergeau warns against: "traits and check boxes [that] tell a story" (2). These
stories become the rhetoric used to "privilege restrictive notions of what it means to
interact and interrelate" (12), as seen in the Theory of Mind that "stories autism in
terms of internal states and cognitive processes" (11) and creates and advertises "a

persistent disbelief in the capacities of autistic people to be volitional, to be social, to be selves" (12). Autism is characterized as "that which contrasts--as that which contrasts with language, humanness, empathy, self-knowledge, understanding, and rhetoricity" itself (2). Thus, the rhetoric of autism places the autistic person outside of human experience. All of this occurs in spite of, or perhaps because of, the "high degree of scientific uncertainty as well as the fact that autism is untreatable as a medical condition" with diagnosis "of autism spectrum disorder in its actual application [being] so broad that it includes children with a wide range of functional abilities in language use and cognitive skills" (Bumiller 969). The rhetoric as understood by an average person[1] has become warped by the dominance of Theory of Mind, "because this god theory has been hugely influential in the trajectory and staying power of autism research, grant funding, and clinical approaches to treatment" (Yergeau 12). This theory tries to understand how people understand themselves and each other, the awareness that "other people have their own unique mental states, feelings, beliefs, and desires... [and] not only recognize intentional stances, but to apprehend that intentional stances exist to begin with" (12). Arguing that these specific neurodivergent individuals are suffering from mindblindness in this way, shifts autism into a catchall for that which stands in contrast to humanity, society, and even a sense of self (26).

This is all to say that it seems like Data's character, knowingly or not, embodies not only much of the common rhetoric used against autistic people, but he also embodies the counter movement of autistic culture that, with "at least three

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[1] I only feel comfortable claiming this as, up to only a year or two ago, I also thought some of these ideas were true. I'm still fighting against the harmful effects these beliefs had on me as I believed, and still believe some days, that I was/am broken in some way since I don't think exactly the same way as 'everyone else says I should'.

decades of activism" (Yergeau 23), was starting to gain steam not long before *The Next Generation*'s inception. As the next character in line to explore the meaning of humanity (Rashkin 322), Data draws from Spock through many personality traits and is further cemented in this role by a guest appearance from DeForest Kelley reprising Dr. McCoy ("Shifting Roles" 54). As the other looking in, it only makes sense that some of the traits he embodies would relate more towards various disenfranchised groups as the questions he raises highlight various beliefs our society holds self-evident or natural as anything but.

Among those beliefs is that of the "supercrip" and the "cured cripple," explained and made especially clear by Doris Zames Fleischer and Freida Zames in their book *The Disability Rights Movement: From Charity to Confrontation*. They talk about American society's "obsession with the myth of… recovery… to be seen, and to see [one]self as a 'cured cripple,' not a person diminished by disability" (1), using Franklin Delano Roosevelt to demonstrate this. Between his years as President and the dedication of his memorial in 1997, the public's "unwillingness to confront the reality of Roosevelt's disability" had not changed as the memorial depicts him standing "as though he were not a wheelchair user" (2). In order to see President Roosevelt as a leader, he had to be shown as "cured." The 'supercrip' meanwhile, as explained by Eli Clare in *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*, is more about stories that "reinforce the superiority of the nondisabled body and mind" (2) and "rely on the perception that disability and achievement contradict each other and that any disabled person who overcomes this contradiction is heroic" (9). Clare furthers this with explanations of their own experiences, especially with mountain climbing and hiking, and continues by noting that "supercrip stories never focus on the conditions that make it so difficult… [the] material, social, legal conditions,

…lack of access, lack of employment, lack of education, lack of personal attendant services…, stereotypes and attitudes…oppression" (3). They argue that "the dominant story about disability should be about ableisms, not the inspirational supercrip crap, the believe-it-or-not disability story" (3). And yet we must acknowledge the complications of this narrative as well, the knowledge that "on the other side of supercripdom lies pity, tragedy, and the nursing home" (9). Thus, disabled people find themselves internalizing the supercrip narrative, "particularly the type that pushes into the extraordinary, cracks into our physical limitations. We use supercripdom as a shield, a protection, as if this individual internalization could defend us against disability oppression" (9). Similar to the 'cured cripple' narrative, the idea is that a person can't have a disability and also do or be anything, an idea clearly false yet insidiously persistent in societal beliefs. Movements created by and/or for people with disabilities as a whole work to change this, but given the existence of these attitudes even today, it is not hard to understand the ideas *TNG*, and Data's character specifically, ended up inheriting.

These ideas, these narratives, are listed by Yergeau in their book *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*, but more important is the questioning of these narratives, their source, and the harm caused by them, that Yergeau also lays out. Chief among these ideas is that of rhetoric: what it is (rhetrickery), what it has done to the autos[2] (those with autism) and the

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[2] This term is used by Yergeau in what seems to be both those with autism, aka 'auties/autos', and also as "the self that so consumes the presumably autistic" (4) when questioning how a self can both exist and not exist when autism is brought into the equation: how the rhetoric ignores or dismisses the individual 'behind' the autism/autistic/neuroqueer.

neurodivergent (the living death), whether we need it (probably), and what can be done about all this (fuck shit up).[3]

> In everyday parlance, most people who discuss 'other people's rhetoric' use rhetoric as a stand-in for 'fucked-up language and trickery.' And while fucked-up language and trickery are indeed part of rhetoric proper, I am invoking a deeper lineage here, a more contested set of meanings. I am invoking ethics, philosophy, cognition, and politics. I am invoking not only the ways in which autism has been figured as lacking in these domains, but also the ways in which autistic people seek to queer those domains, to fuck up that which is already fucked up. (6)

With this introduction, Yergeau explains that "it is not uncommon… for rhetoricians to claim that rhetoric is what makes us human" and that "rhetoric comprises how we learn things and how we live" making "autism, by contrast, the dissolution of such learning" (6). Yergeau questions this assumption. They argue that rhetoric has been conceived as "the thing which mediates reality by means of discourse" (13), but it is important that the rhetorical tradition has also been connected to the idea of intentionality and purpose, which Yergeau wants to question. They focus on the claim that "rhetoric both invents and is invented by humans, individually and collectively" and that "engagement, reciprocity, empathy--these things, and more, are configured as that which rhetoric requires in order to effect change… and… each of these items is deeply connected to intentionality" (37). Yet if this is what makes us human, it presents a problem for autistic people who are often seen as lacking rhetorical ability. Yergeau shows how "many scholars have argued… that autism precludes the ability

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[3] I'm purposefully using the same style of powerful and ironic language Yergeau uses to regain agency in neuroqueer communities.

to both compose and enjoy stories" (7); thus, autistic people are written out of access to the discourse of humanness. One has only to look at articles in journals about autism to see how autistic autobiography has been described as "lacking rhetorical facility" (7). Therefore, "autism represents decided lack. These are the stories through which we know autism, even as these same stories claim that autism remains unknowable, unnarratable" (7). Arguing against this narrative, subverting this, and showing how it is used to deny the Other, is one of Yergeau's main goals of the book.

Theory of Mind (ToM) and applied behavior analysis (ABA) come together to form the still largely dominant narrative of those with autism as "involuntarily willed and involuntarily drafted--beholden not only to neuronal desires but to the desires of therapists and caregivers and social norms" (12), giving a chilling syllogism that goes with it:

-One must be human in order to be rhetorical.

-Autistic people are not rhetorical.

-Autistic people are not human. (11)

Of course, this narrative denies autistic people their humanity, agency, and story. And yet, this narrative persists despite the fact that "rhetorical studies' primary project has long been interrogating what the fuck rhetoric even is… for rhetoric is ever shifting, historically contingent, powerfully shaped, impelled by predictions about nebulous futures, and seemingly always related to (no, *defined by*) context and situation" (Yergeau 88). What syllogism can be trusted that builds from uncertain, maybe even unknowable, premises to give equally uncertain, unknowable conclusions? If autistic people can, in fact, be rhetorical (they can), and are, in fact, human (duh), then what does this syllogism even give us? It gives us a possibility of rhetoric outside the realm of the strictly human; it gives us Data.

The idea for the non-human to also be rhetorical in this case becomes important as an added ability to pushback against the upsetting narrative of "autism [as] a living death… a mechanistic entelechy, a life force that is ironically typified by death… the trope of the alien… the inhuman" (Yergeau 14). As a signifier, Data's mechanical self, a body that is alive but not *human*, mirrors these autistic narratives. *Star Trek*, as a media juggernaut, has already shown itself to be culturally important throughout the years, as the writers never shied away from asking questions and showing darker sides of humanity, while the very genre of science fiction only added to this ability, allowing *Star Trek* to build on a foundation already interested in asking hard questions, as well as further push and build this foundation for others later. This allows certain characters, like Data, to follow in the steps of common rhetoric techniques and become a character "deployed… for rhetorical effect in different times and places" (Jack 3). These characters "are especially common in autism discourse because they help fill gaps in knowledge or authority about autism" (4), meaning that even without being first intended to be a commentary on autistic ideas or individuals with neuroqueer brains, Data would have immediately been noticed and claimed in this discourse as an incredibly important, and surprisingly positive, role model and character source for the time. This is especially important since Data turned out to embody one of the major "stock roles or personae that appear in autism discourse" (2) before it actually came into being in the late 1990s: the male computer geek.

In fact, the only characteristic about Data that fits into the "primary depiction as a condition affecting male children" (Jack 26) at the time of the show's start is the fact that Data seems to be physically male. As the children first studied and diagnosed with what would eventually be termed autism in the 1940s would certainly have been adults by this point, as well as at least one more generation between then and the time

of *TNG*'s airing, an entire group of people were suddenly seeing themselves in the media. Autism as a diagnosis wasn't present in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* or (*DSM)* until the third edition in 1980, and this was focused on "Infantile Autism," which wasn't expanded into 'Autistic Disorder' until *DSM*-III-R in 1987, and still only focused on infancy or childhood onset and symptoms (Herman). Even the latest edition, *DSM*-5 from 2013 still specifies that "these symptoms must be present in early childhood and that the symptoms together limit and impair everyday functioning" (Jack 8), meaning that when *TNG* first aired in late 1987, those who were seeing themselves in Data's character may not have even had the words to describe why they or Data were different from others, even if *Star Trek*'s writers had meant to create a character to comment on mental/emotional disabilities and the new discoveries at the time. Whereas the "diagnostic language that frames autism discourages people from understanding autistic individuals as capable, rational, or intelligent as opposed to sufferers of a mysterious and devastating condition" (8), Data was entirely capable, rational, and intelligent; fully aware of his differences and perceived lack; and made it his goal to learn from the people around him and better himself, inevitably inspiring the other characters to likewise learn from him and rely on him as he relied on them. The importance of this representation should hardly come as a surprise then, as "representations of autism *matter*, insofar as they influence how autistic people are treated in real life" (12), and these choices of framing or rhetoric allow autism to be "often presented as a crisis, a disaster, or a sentence to a life of devastating isolation… tend[ing] to support problematic narratives that position it as something to be overcome or beaten, rather than a neurological difference that can be recognized and even celebrated" (27). Data becomes a sort of proto-stereotypical character, though he still varies in several important ways from the

rhetorical trope that would come about after *TNG*. The group of people who had not only lacked vocabulary for these differences but also had been lacking positive role models and media representation took notice and quickly claimed Data as one of their own because of the rhetoric and stereotypes he fit into; the group of people today who, while equipped with more vocabulary and understanding, still mostly lack positive role models and media representation are able to *keep* claiming Data as one of their own because of the rhetoric and stereotypes he breaks and veers away from.

Data and the Supercrip Narrative

If autism is seen as "that which contrasts with language, humanness, empathy, self-knowledge, understanding, and rhetoricity" (Yergeau 2), then it becomes clear that an individual who succeeds 'must' not be 'fully autistic', or else they 'must' only be succeeding in one aspect and not in others, a success 'despite their limitations.' This super crip narrative is commonly critiqued in disability studies, and here is especially useful when discussing the 'computer geek' and the 'savant' stereotypes often associated with autistic individuals. Many narratives of autism have equated the autistic person with computer geeks, and this "has shaped definitions of the syndrome as associated with science and technology--and with maleness and masculinity" (Jack 106). Noticeably these ideas suggest a removal of, or a lack of, emotions and the knowledge of inner mental states of the self or others. The problem with the 'success stories' of the autistic computer geek is best phrased by Jordynn Jack's explanation that 'super crips' are:

> people who are celebrated for surmounting disabilities but who do so by creating an impossibly high standard for others with disabilities. The *but* in these sentences reflects the logic of super-crip narratives--these individuals have accomplished major achievements despite their disabilities, not because

of them. In some cases, though, autistic individuals are depicted as achieving

phenomenal feats *because* of their neurological differences, as is the case with

savants. (27)

Media leans towards representations of overcoming, not of recognition or celebration.

In this way, Data and *TNG* often fall into patterns reminiscent of the super-

crip, as Data's entire arc can be summarized as an attempt to do the impossible and

become human, learning and showing emotions like everyone else to overcome his

perceived lack. While the writing, acting, and eventual direction for Data's character

hadn't been solidified yet, the very first episode "Encounter at Farpoint" makes it

clear that he was going to be *TNG*'s Spock-type character as his first scene shows his

highly logical, unbothered reaction to orders deemed 'difficult,' his confusion over

the use of slang, and his lack of awareness of any annoyance he then causes by

rattling off synonyms after learning the definition of the slang phrase he was confused

over ("Encounter at Farpoint" 7). This idea is further driven home by a later scene

where Data is escorting the now old admiral McCoy, who notes quickly that Data

"sound[s] like a Vulcan" after the former exactly recalls McCoy's age as stated in

records. The idea of Data 'inheriting' Spock's role on the ship ("Shifting Roles" 53),

as well as his role to audiences among the characters, however, seems to also include

inheriting the theories and discussion surrounding Spock as showing behaviors

commonly associated with autism (Groner 264). In fact, the very scenes connecting

Data with Spock for the viewers who watched the original series also display these

'autistically connected' traits as Data acts 'inappropriately' for a pseudo-military

environment when he "interrupts; delighted" and lists no less than nine synonyms to

the slang phrase of "snooping" before "he trails off his words, finally becoming aware

of the annoyance registering on Captain Picard's face" ("Encounter at Farpoint" 7).

While others present are amused, and we as the audience are also clearly meant to be, the captain clearly isn't. Even Data's stilted, formal speech and movements, his very existence as a 'machine' as opposed to a biological entity, seem to push this comparison to both Spock and stereotypical autistic behaviors, even though both existed before the common perception of techno-savant was really blossoming in the public conscious. The biggest divergence between Spock and Data's characters is shown, still in the first episode, as Data meets the first officer Riker for the first time. When Riker admits to being troubled by Data being a machine, Data replies that he understands, as "prejudice is very human" ("Encounter at Farpoint" 72). When Riker suggests that that reply troubles him even more, and asks "Do you consider yourself superior to us?", Data's reply is simple and straightforward: "I am superior in many ways. But I would gladly give it up to be human" (72). Up to his very last comment, this could still be something Spock might have said in the matter-of-fact tone that annoyed Dr. McCoy so much in the original series, but Data instead longs for the emotional, imperfect, illogical humanness that Spock forever tried to dismiss, or at least downplay, in himself.

Though almost a decade before the "stock character [Asperger's as computer geek] emerged from a rhetorical landscape in which commonplaces about masculinity, males, geeks, and technology are already in place and made present in an economic context driven by the internet bubble of the late 1990s" (Jack 106), Data seems to exemplify this still prevalent trope. Despite his struggle to understand emotions, overtly logical and literal nature and understanding of the world, and the constant 'comedic' situations the show gives as the interaction of someone with those traits and the 'normal' individuals around them, he is still shown to become a valued and trusted member of the Enterprise, and at least partially of the Federation itself. I

say 'despite' specifically, as this seems to be the most common interpretation of Data and his character arc in *TNG*.

For instance, in "Deja Q," the omnipotent trickster Q is stripped of his powers by the rest of the continuum he belongs to, is turned into a human, and deposited on the Enterprise. The crew, not believing his story and dealing with another crisis already, initially put him in the brig before reluctantly allowing him to try to help out and 'earn his keep,' with the caveat that he would be accompanied by Data at all times. Their first interaction sets the tone as Data comments that, should Q really be telling the truth, then he has "achieved in disgrace what [Data has] always aspired to be" ("Deja Q" Script 16), receiving an incredibly confused look from Q in response till ushered out. Q then seems to be trying to convince Data that he's better without humanity's emotions by claiming humans "are a minor species in the grand scheme. Not worth your envy" (16), to which Data first corrects him that he doesn't feel envy, then continues to say he feels "nothing at all" (16A). On Q's abrupt stop and confused look in his direction, Data explains his dilemma: "I have the curiosity of humans… but there are questions that I will never have the answers to… What it is like to laugh or cry or to experience any human emotions…?" (16A). Q gives a curious 'hmm' in response, an interesting action on its own considering how it mirrors one of Data's own common reactions, and tells him, "Well if you ask me, these 'human emotions' are not what they're cracked up to be" ("Deja Q" Episode). This interestingly differs from a version of the script that instead has Q stating "Believe me, life's a lot simpler without feelings… a lot simpler…" ("Deja Q" Script 16A). While an analysis on Q could easily span its own chapter, the point here is that Q seems to believe either feelings in general or the 'accepted human emotions' (or both) are lesser somehow,

and not worth Data's attempts to gain or emulate, in other words, that he is 'fine' how he is.

Despite this, Q begins relying on Data almost immediately for explanations on why other crew members are responding in specific ways to him and advice on his own needs and feelings. In one scene, Guinan, a woman from a mysterious species with apparent bad history with the Continuum, states that Q "could learn a lot from [Data]" ("Deja Q" Script 23). Despite Q's belligerent response about "the robot who teaches the course in humanities" (23), and Data's immediate correction of robot to android, Q seems to do just that. Data is the only person to give Q answers and explanations for what he doesn't understand, the only person to treat Q with any sort of respect or to give Q credit when he *is* trying to help, and the only person to try and help both times the Calmarain try to abduct Q, nearly dying in the process.

Data's positive influence overall and near sacrifice just to save him has a profound effect on Q. During an emotional scene between him and Captain Picard, Q asks why Data would have sacrificed himself like that for someone no one seems to like, to which Picard responds that "that is his special nature. He has learned the lessons of humanity well" ("Deja Q" Script 41). Q, forced to face the shame he now feels on realizing he wouldn't have done the same, and the lack of sympathy from Picard and the crew, goes to visit Data one last time in Sickbay. He reiterates his belief that Data still isn't missing anything by not having emotions, and that there are those who would envy his lack of feelings (implicating himself here), but after a pause, he concludes with "If it means anything to you, Data… you are a better human than I" (44). *Despite* Q's actual biological humanness in this moment, and Data's lack, Data has overcome that to gain the descriptor. *Despite* Data's supposed lack of emotions and understanding of behaviors, he has achieved at least a sort of humanity

and understanding that everyone else seems to accept. He is able to form relationships in order to work properly on a starship, understand the emotional states of others and their subsequent motivations or goals, and he can relay these things to someone else learning to be human for the first time: Data is apparently superhuman in both physicality and ability to surmount his disability, creating one hell of a high bar for those who might identify with him.

But there is another side of success stories in disability narratives, embodied in autistic narratives specifically as the computer geek or savant who "are depicted [as] achieving phenomenal feats because of their neurological differences" (Jack 27), not despite them. Data exemplifies this narrative. In "Redemption pt. II" for instance, Data is set to temporarily command the starship Sutherland, though only after he has to ask Captain Picard why he expressed concern over not having enough senior officers to man a fleet while also skipping over Data with 26 years of service, stating, "However, if you do not believe the time has arrived for an android to command a starship, then perhaps I should address myself to improving---" ("Redemption pt. II" Script 10). Picard quickly interrupts and gives him his command, but Data's victory would be short lived, and his worries would be proven correct, as immediately upon assuming command, Lt. Cmd. Hobson stops what he's doing, walks to Data, and requests a transfer. When Data expresses confusion and asks why, Hobson responds "I don't believe I would be a good first officer for you" (16). It's only after Data states that Hobson's service record suggests otherwise that Hobson repeats himself, emphasizing "for *you*" this time, and adding "Frankly, sir… I don't believe in your ability to command this ship" (17), that he "takes the plunge" and continues:

Data says nothing, his face impassive. Hobson has taken the plunge… might

as well lay it all out. He speaks without anger, with a strictly professional

concern… which only makes his assessment more damning.

Hobson (continuing): You're a fellow officer and I respect that… but no one

would suggest that a Klingon would make a good ship's counselor or that a

Berellian could be an engineer. They're just not suited for those positions.

(beat) By the same token, I don't think that an android is a good choice to be

captain. (17)

The most obvious parallel for Data's treatment here is one of racism, and I have no intention of arguing against this reading. Data, by virtue of being an android, but one made in the image of humanity, sits in a sort of liminal space between a great many othered communities, but here specifically it seems that it is Data's overly logical mind being rejected by Hobson. Berellions aren't a race that ever actually appear or are mentioned again anywhere else, but Klingons are not only incredibly well known even by 'passing audiences' as aggressive warrior types, the other, intertwined story of this two-part episode is a dangerous Klingon civil war sparking up and threatening to drag numerous interstellar empires and allies into an all out war, as enemy forces work to make the Klingon empire implode from within. If Klingons can't be good counselors, dealing with emotions, relationships, and conflict deescalation, then Data as an android cannot make command decisions that would properly weigh choices and the human elements within.

This reasoning is seen more clearly with each new scene on the Sutherland. During the next, when a radiation leak suddenly starts, Hobson ignores Data and takes charge, giving orders until Data is forced to confront him directly, at which point "Hobson deliberately uses this opportunity to put Data in a bad light and make him

seem petty and small-minded," answering that he was "trying to safeguard the lives of people on those decks, but you're right" ("Redemption pt. II" Script 25). This forces Data to make the same order Hobson had while realizing that "the initiative and command authority seems to have left with Hobson" (26). His push that Data doesn't have the emotional capacity, or the theory of mind, for command, comes to a head in their next scene. Realizing the enemies have a tactical weakness he could exploit, but that the opportunity won't be there long enough to explain to the fleet, Data gives an order to stop and bring weapons online, hoping to ignite a cloud of particles in order to reveal the enemy's cloaked ships and force them to retreat without fighting. Not only does this go against Picard's orders to the fleet, but this will cause radiation to begin leaking again in the Sutherland till they turn the weapons back off and fix them. As "Hobson's anger finally boils over" he confronts Data, yelling in front of the whole bridge "You don't give a damn about the people whose lives you're about to throw away! We're not just machines that you can--" (52). At which point Data cuts him off, and if he truly has no emotions, then he has an incredible ability to emulate thinly contained anger as he snaps back at Hobson to "carry out [his] orders or [he] will relieve [Hobson] of duty" (52). This doesn't seem to actually stop Hobson from questioning every order he gives, only increasing the tenseness with every sharp look and reiteration of orders Data has to give, but when the plan works and the enemies begin to retreat, Hobson immediately changes his tune, "smil[ing] and look[ing] at Data with newfound respect" (54). The very same abilities that made Hobson so sure Data could never make the right decisions and be a good captain are precisely the same abilities that allowed him to absorb all the information of the situation as it developed, recognize the patterns and possibilities of where the enemy ships would have to be, and come up with an immediate plan to render their cloaking technology

useless. In other words, *because* of the way Data's mind works, he saves the day, and despite Hobson's accusations, no lives are lost. This idea does, however, imply that one may need to be of savant level skills in a field before one can be accepted by general society, which causes a different, but no less insidious, problem for those who might identify with Data.

But if both of these representations have problems, which is the best way forward? Perhaps both AND neither, and following Yergeau, the answer may instead be to queer the whole question itself, the whole narrative. Luckily, though limited in both knowledge and the restrictions of television, I believe *TNG* and Data specifically were able to do enough of this to become the incredibly popular and autistically identified character he was, and still is. If "autism represents a queer way of being that simultaneously embraces and rejects the rhetorical… queer[s] the lines of rhetoric, humanity, and agency… and requires the reconceptualization of rhetoric's very essence" (Yergeau Back cover synopsis), then applying this lens to Data and *TNG*'s writing could open up new insights and ideas on disability narratives and media representations of this oft dismissed and denied group. After all, there's a "power in testimony and witnessing, as well as [an] activist strand that often travel[s] through autist texts… [and] transcends the solitary construction of autos--in both autism and the autobiographical--and work[s] intertextually to narrate and protest oppression" (24). Data and *TNG* cannot help but protest, to be activist, to be interrelational, to witness, to be a testimony: it is the autists involuntary revolution, our involution, after all (13). Just as Yergeau questions "the centrality of intentionality and purpose within the rhetorical tradition" (32) in order to "call into question theories that deny autistic people's capacity for free will and intent… [and] also argue that rhetoricity itself should not remain contingent on a rhetor's intent, or, more pointedly, on the

perceptions of a rhetor's intent" (32), this reading of Data itself allows for the reading both with and against the 'intended narrative' that viewers have often applied to *Star Trek* media in queer readings to allow for the visibility and existence not quite allowed but certainly hinted at.

Data Queering Humanity, Agency, and Rhetoric

Data and his storyline queer human(ity) itself. After all, when so many "stories position autism as a mechanistic entelechy, a life force… typified by death… the alien" (Yergeau 14), as "mechanistic, rigid, routinized, reducable" (16), and as the other side of the binary from humans, as "robots-en-organisme" (15), why *wouldn't* Data bring into question assumptions of humanness or 'peopleness' as his main difference from any other biological organism is not understanding emotions in the same way? As Data himself states in the episode "Data's Day,"

> If being human is not simply a matter of being born flesh and blood… if it is instead a way of thinking, acting… and feeling… then I am hopeful that one day I will discover my own humanity. Until then Commander Maddox, I will continue… learning, changing, growing… and trying to become more than what I am. ("Data's Day" script 62)

The question isn't, and shouldn't be, about Data's human/not status, but about his *personhood*, something that risks getting lost when talking about science fiction's way of bringing up and discussing these issues. The alien or machine other is often used in ways to discuss historical treatment of any number of othered communities, helping to give perspective on the ridiculous and awful dehumanization tactics used to allow equally ridiculous and awful practices. In the end, however, they are all *people*, and Data is technically no exception, though it takes pushing and legal battles to get there.

The largest, and most open, portion of this battle to be recognized as a person is in only the second season, in the episode "The Measure of a Man," which introduces Commander Maddox, one member of the committee that "evaluated Data when it first applied to the Academy" and, as Data immediately adds, was "the sole member of the committee to oppose [Data's] entrance on the grounds that [he] was not a sentient being" ("The Measure of a Man" script 10). Immediately, there's quite a lot to unpack in just these bits of dialogue, such as Maddox's use of 'it' and not 'he' for Data, the fact that Data went through all the appropriate application steps implying his *choice* to join and not a directive by Starfleet, and the knowledge that Maddox and Data have likely been at odds ever since, if Maddox was the only person then and still now to not view Data as a sentient being. This becomes even more clear when Picard asks what Maddox is on board for, and his immediate reply is that he's "going to disassemble Data" (11). It only gets worse as Maddox launches into an explanation of how he became obsessed on first sight, "want[ing] to understand it… becom[ing] a student of the works of Doctor Noonien Soong--Data's creator… [has] tried to continue his work, and… believe[s] [himself] very close to the breakthrough which will enable [him] to duplicate Soong's work and replicate this" (11), pointing to Data. He further explains that he doesn't quite have all the potential problems worked out yet, but is sure he'll have the answers once he's taken Data apart and examined the pieces (12). On Picard and Data being understandably concerned about the risks Maddox seems to be downplaying, Maddox states, "I thought this might be your attitude, Captain" (13), again ignoring Data's thoughts on the matter, before pulling out orders that allow him to demand Data be transferred over, allowing him to do his experiment as he pleases.

As it shifts to the next scene, Picard expresses some discomfort with the situation, but more because of not being told before losing an officer, not because of the danger. When Data enters, Picard suggests he do as Maddox asked without the transfer, meaning he'd be able to come back to the Enterprise after--if he survived, a fact he neglects to mention. When Data refuses, Picard tries to convince him that it would be in Starfleet's best interests, saying, "If Commander Maddox is correct there is a possibility that many more beings such as yourself could be constructed" and that "Starfleet would be immeasurably enriched" ("The Measure of a Man" script 15). He finishes by stating that Starfleet officers "take an oath to serve. In this case this is the form your service is taking" (16). Data, however, immediately turns the question around, asking "why are not all human officers required to have their eyes replaced with cybernetic implants" (16), referencing his friend Lieutenant La Forge, if simple enrichment and the best interests of Starfleet were the concern, immediately connecting himself to another individual with a disability and their prosthetic. The reaction is telling:

> Picard is utterly at a loss for words. We can see the confusion on his face as he struggles for an answer to this unanswerable remark. Data rises with great dignity.
>
> Data (continuing): I see. It is precisely because I am not human. (17)

At this point, Picard dismisses Data and begins looking up regulations that might be able to help, but the problem has been laid out in the open now. It's not just that Data isn't biologically human, it is that he isn't viewed as a fully sentient being, or as Yergeau says, a fully rhetorical being. If he were just a different species, he'd be viewed no differently than all the other species throughout the Federation, even ones they're fighting with. Ironically, Data was tested and accepted as a sentient being;

thus, it is something about his specific 'style' of sentience that is being rejected or ignored here. He is a victim of "shitty narratives--rhetorical commonplaces that author autistic people as victim-captives of a faulty neurology, as rhetorically degraded and rhetorically suspect" (Yergeau 4). As neurodivergent, Data's humanity is always in question, his narrative already written for him. These narratives persist

> because their rhetorical power derives from the figure of the autistic as unknowable, as utterly abject and isolated and tragic, as a figure whose actions are construed less like actions and more like neuronally willed middle fingers… rhetorical projects [that] apprehend neuroqueerness as interlocking series of socially complex impairments… that impact the domains of relatedness, intent, feeling, sexuality, gender identity, and sensation--indeed, all of that which might be used to call oneself properly a person. (Yergeau 4)

Data's own reiterations that he cannot feel emotions, then, turns into a belief, either in himself or others (or both) that he lacks the related theory of mind needed to 'count' as a person, or even have a grasp on reality (12). Of course, Data wouldn't be able to do his job if he couldn't grasp reality, throwing the rest of his perceived lacks into question, including his own constant assertions of his lack of emotions or understanding of emotions' power over his biological crewmates.

Data, though he thinks differently, displays a deep understanding of humanity better than Maddox. In Data's next scene, for example, we see him packing, and the first thing we see him grab is what the script calls a "holocube" ("The Measure of a Man" script 18), a device that gives a sort of holographic projection of someone like a high-tech picture frame. When he turns it on, a projection appears of Tasha Yar, the security chief from the previous season who had a relationship with Data, though mostly off camera before abruptly dying from casting issues. Maddox enters shortly

after, without permission, and Maddox picks up the book Data set aside with his belongings, opening it to the marked sonnet, sonnet 29 by Shakespeare as it happens, and reads out the quote, "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, / I all alone beweep my outcast state" (19), suggesting quite a bit about Data's frame of mind and view on those around him. Maddox immediately, however, asks if it is "just words to you, or do you fathom the meaning?" (19), seeming to still not be willing to give Data the benefit of the doubt. In response, Data seems to dismiss him by commenting on Maddox entering without permission, clearly not in the mood for pleasantries, whether or not he can feel human emotions. While Maddox attempts to convince Data that his "memories and knowledge would remain intact" through his procedure, so he wouldn't really die, Data responds by explaining that they would be "reduced to mere sterile facts of the events. The substance, the flavor of the moment could be lost… that [Maddox hasn't] acquired the expertise necessary to preserve the heart of those experiences… [the] ineffable quality to memory that I do not believe can survive the shutdown of my core" (19). Despite Data's moving belief of his memory and self being more than just computerized information like others seem to believe, a belief Maddox seems almost amused by, as well as Data's further assertion that he has made the decision to resign in order to protect Dr. Soong's dream, "something unique and wonderful… added to the universe" (20), Maddox ominously warns Data "one way or the other you *will* be reporting" (20).

It is in this hostile interaction that a court is called to decide whether Data can resign, or whether he's just property, a non-sentient machine with no rights, able to be taken apart and experimented on to potentially further the knowledge of others. While rights and the potential of slavery should Maddox succeed in creating more androids become the ideas to form the final nail in the coffin for the case, Data's sentience is

the wood itself, as Maddox is neither able to prove Data *isn't* sentient, despite his assertion that he isn't, nor can he prove Picard *is* sentient, casting doubt on the true difference between them anyway. At Maddox's answer that "intelligence, self-awareness, [and] consciousness" are the traits required for sentience ("The Measure of a Man" script 45), I'm forced to remember Yergeau's collection of various definitions of autism, most of which are vague at best, and suggest autism as "perplexing" and without a "biological model" to even define it properly. Autism characterized as that which "contrasts… with language, humanness, empathy, self-knowledge, understanding, and rhetoricity" (Yergeau 2) is the claim I specifically want to repeat here, to draw attention to how it compares to Maddox's definition of sentience. In the court scene, Picard pushes Maddox to further define specifically what he means by each of his 3 prerequisites. Intelligence, he explains, is "the ability to learn and understand, and to cope with new situations" ("The Measure of a Man" script 47), which he admits Data certainly has, even beyond the computer geek or savant stereotype. The next prerequisite proves a bit harder, however, as Maddox suggests being self-aware means "you are conscious of your existence and actions. You're aware of yourself and your own ego" (47): in other words, one needs to have a fully developed Theory of Mind. Picard's proof that Data has this is given by asking what he's doing in the court, what is happening, and why. Data answers easily, but no one dwells on the answer as Picard takes this moment to pivot towards Maddox's personal feelings and view of Data, as he puts pressure on Maddox, asking why he would be okay with using and creating expendable labor that is even approaching sentient. This pivot is well timed, considering Maddox' very definition of self-awareness includes being conscious, which is also his third given prerequisite, and is never elaborated on. His self-awareness and consciousness are instead left up in the air, but also somewhat

assumed as a given, making the terms just as perplexing and contradictory as a diagnosis of autism tends to be, and leaving Data in a similar rhetorical quagmire that suggests the neuroqueer as non-human/non-sentient, even as he's awarded sentience in the very same episode. Further muddling things is Data's relation not just to humanness/sentience, but the agency awarded to those who can claim uncontested access to these categories.

The rhetoric surrounding the agency of people with disabilities is not pleasant, much like the rhetoric of many disenfranchised communities, and those diagnosed with autism are no different as the very story told of lacking humanity or personhood doesn't exactly lend itself well to seeing a person as having control, or even the ability to have control, over their lives. One of the easiest ways to see this is in the narrowing and constricting we see around stories of autism or individuals with autism, as, in Yergeau's words, "the clinicalization of autism requires the clinicalization of rhetoric, because how else to measure that which the autistic lacks?" (14). Every "construct that rhetoric prizes and privileges… is a construct that autistics are claimed to lack" (14), which leads to Yergeau's statement, "I was no longer my body's author" (2) after a diagnosis was given. The stories of computer geeks or savants become both diagnostic and 'inspirational tale.' The narratives of the autistic person become the story of one incapable of agency. The stories of the "hug-avoidant autistic child" present "the parent-or the person who isn't being hugged- as the empathetic character" (4) that the 'normal' should empathize with for taking care of such 'incapable' children. In this way, the autistic person is not even the subject in the story. Instead, the story characterizes them as impaired, as lacking in "the domains of relatedness, intent, feeling, sexuality, gender identity, and sensations-indeed, all of that which might be used to call oneself properly a person" (4). These narratives

become the explanations and reasons for why an individual 'surely' can't tell their own story and must have their story told by others who 'know better,' "often divulged without the full and informed consent of the autistic person being depicted" (3). These narratives author autistic people as victim-captives of a faulty neurology, as rhetorically degraded and rhetorically suspect" (3); and these stories have the same effect: "through diagnosis, autistics are storied into autism, our bodyminds made determinable and knowable through the criteria of neurodevelopmental disability… [and] nonautistic stakeholders become authorized as autism somethings-as autism parents. . . Researchers. . . Therapists and specialists and mentors and advocates" (2), all with more rhetorical power than the very people they talk about/over. While this is certainly visible in "A Measure of a Man" as an entire court speaks mostly for and about Data in the pursuit of the 'truth' of his status, another clear example is in the episode "The Offspring" as the Enterprise crew and the Federation itself react to Data's creation of a child.

The first exchange between Picard and Data on the captain's learning of Data's android child Lal succinctly sets the tone for what will be the reactions of others, especially in the Federation, after the ruling on Data in the previous mentioned episode was passed. Picard, realizing "this is not the time and place to confront [Data]. Suppresses his anger…" and says, "I would like to have been consulted" ("The Offspring" script 5A), to which Data responds bluntly and says, "I have not observed anyone else on board consult with you about their procreation, captain" (5A). While a potentially amusing line on its own, in context it suggests a level of agency and control over his own decision making and desires that Picard either didn't expect, or didn't want, Data to possess. When Picard allows that Data is correct, he then qualifies that "in your case… it's not quite the same" (6), and Data's insistence

that "the intention is the same" and further explanation linking the method he used

with a human passing down genes (6) doesn't seem to be enough to sway the captain,

though the other crew seems to agree with Data. His existence and actions on the

periphery of so many groups, socially as a single male parent and propagator,

physically as a machine/super human in a way that could be threatening, and mentally

as somehow 'lacking' the same emotional quality expected, all could theoretically

lead themselves to Picard's concern, and while he does offer a few reasons for Data's

actions as 'mistake,' one does eventually pull ahead as the main concern. Away from

Data, Picard immediately expresses concern for allowing people to view Lal as a

child, claiming instead that "it is an invention, albeit an extraordinary one" (7A), in an

unfortunate reversal from his stance on Data himself. Thankfully, others in the crew

immediately make it clear that they disagree, something Picard also didn't expect.

When he does get to talk to Data directly in private, he starts by reiterating to

Data that "What you have done has very serious ramifications and I am dismayed that

you did not inform anyone of what you were doing" (7A), again seeming to assume a

certain level of agency or self-direction either missing or removed from Data in

general. As he continues, the implication or assumption that Data could in no way be

prepared, making this an irresponsible decision, seems to come up in multiple lines

just in this scene. Picard first calls it a "stupendous undertaking," asking if Data has

"any idea what will happen when Starfleet learns of this" (8). Next, he reacts with fear

arguing that "the safety of this ship and crew" is his concern because Data, and now

Lal, are "faster, stronger, and more knowledgeable than any human" (8); thus,

Starfleet's reaction doesn't seem to be a concern for Data. Of course, Data points out

that Lal has all the same programming that he does which makes him 'safe', but

Picard objects that Lal could 'malfunction', ignoring again that Data's programming

will essentially self-destruct in a case like that, meaning Lal's would too. By stating this, Picard implies that something about Data's *normal* mental state being replicated could be the problem. Seeing that he's getting nowhere, however, and "still fuming" (9), Picard again shifts to responsibility, suggesting Data isn't prepared for the "extraordinary consequences of creating a new life… to achieve what no one… has been able to achieve- to make another sentient, functional android" (10) as if this, again, is different somehow from parenting or having a child in general. Instead, Picard seems concerned about Data having full agency and creating a family.

As the episode cuts eventually to Data teaching Lal about the world, teaching her how to process her senses and speak, we're actually provided a log as he records her progress, specifically commenting that her sensory comprehension, social skills, and hand/eye coordination "seem to be proceeding at a slower developmental rate" (18) and that her curiosity about those social skills she lacks especially "sometimes creates inappropriate behavior" (19) as a scene is shown where Lal sits in the captain's chair, provoking annoyance from Picard much like his and Data's first encounter, before Data can escort her away. While not wanting to try to 'diagnose' a fictional character or reduce her and her scenes to mere 'symptoms,' it does seem important that these specific difficulties would be written in, as well as the parallel to Data's own early days and development. Lal, being both younger in appearance and in actual age/development, starts to more closely resemble the understanding of autism during the 1980s as first 'Infantile Autism' and then 'Autistic Disorder' but still heavily skewed towards childhood visibility and rhetoric (Herman), which additionally leads to the "infantilizing… and elid[ing] [of] the concerns of autistic adults" (Jack 12).

When the episode eventually returns to Picard, he is speaking to an admiral in Starfleet, arguing against him even, as the admiral seems to be explaining that they have "superior facilities and personnel" to take care of Lal, that they "only want what's best for the new android" and that "frankly, as extraordinary as he is, Data's an imperfect role model… whose presence would undoubtedly retard the new android's progress" ("The Offspring" script 23). This is perhaps one of the clearest scenes where "Involuntarity is forcibly imposed onto the autistic bodies, onto neurodivergent bodies writ large, often to violent effect" (Yergeau 9) as the threat of separation and institutionalization is literally given here to push the narrative that Data and Lal are "clinically crafted as… subject[s] in need of disciplining and normalization" and that they have "deviant behaviors and affectations" which need to be fixed "by means of early intensive behavioral intervention (EIBI)" (26). For Data, it's too late, but for Lal, it seems to be suggested they might be able "to recover whatever neurotypical residuals might lie within… [and] surface the logics and rhetorics of normalcy" (26). This serves the purpose of removing agency and control from both Data and Lal, controls any narrative going forward, and follows in the long and horrible history of sterilization/eugenics to prevent the 'dreaded future' with autism/disability (19).

Unfortunately, the other well-known narrative followed, of characters who break boundaries not being allowed to remain, leads to Lal's death before the episode can be allowed to complete. Like the rhetoric of the 'tragic mulatto,' Lal briefly surpasses the sum of her parts, feeling true emotion for a short time, before the clash of those separate parts, parts that everyone else believes can never coexist, then tears her apart ("Dating Data" 269). Despite Data and the admiral now working together and Data's specific abilities and knowledge beyond anyone else in the relevant skills,

they cannot save her as it almost seems her 'cure' of her inherited neuroqueerness, the forced normal, is in fact what kills her.

Though Data, in this penultimate scene and throughout the show's run, still reiterates that he cannot feel emotions, and cannot feel love with Lal in her final moments, this episode does start a few narrative decisions that allow at least a partial push back against the 'typical' heartbreaking ending. First, the script offers direction for Data, specifying that, although "Data looks at Lal with an impassive face… we must sense the extraordinary weight of his failure on his shoulders" (57), which is only one example of directions suggesting something not entirely on one side or the other in terms of his lack or not of emotions or Theory of Mind. Secondly, earlier in this episode as Data asks Dr. Crusher for advice on parenting, as she is the only other current parent in the bridge crew, he mentions that he "can give [Lal] attention… but [is] incapable of giving her love", to which the doctor merely smiles and replies, "Why do I find that so hard to believe?" (28). His feelings may be unlike his neurotypical crewmates' understanding of emotions, but they still seem to be present enough that others, both in the crew and in the audience, feel obligated to convince Data of this and his subsequent position in some step in-between the two ideas that Data isn't totally aware of. Finally, Data speaks at the end that Lal's "presence so enriched my life that I could not allow her to pass into oblivion. So I incorporated her programs back into my own… I transferred her memories to me" (58). This means that at the very least, Data now has knowledge and memories of *feeling* those emotions, not just approximate knowledge of emotions one might get from a dictionary. It could also suggest, however, the integration into Data of those very programs that allowed Lal to feel.

Either way, it allows a queering of the rhetoric following Data through the rest of the series and the rhetoric following othered communities and the neuroqueer specifically through him. Data provides a medium to confront the narrative of neurodivergent people as lacking humanness and agency, while asserting the ability and value of any lives that fall outside of the 'traditional'. At a time before the ADA was passed and before the activism of the autistic community, Data provides a fascinating glimpse into the possibilities of a new narrative for the neurodivergent and the potential for action that provides a revolution for neuroqueerness today, and the autistic community embracing of his character illustrates how even partial visibility in media can open a space for queering of humanity, agency, and rhetoric.

CHAPTER III

"Please Don't Take My Sunshine Away": The EMH and Access

Star Trek Voyager's Emergency Medical Hologram, known throughout the show's run simply as the EMH, Doctor, or Doc, has received little scholarly attention.[4] He is given no name, rarely appears outside some sort of holodeck (usually sickbay), and is often treated with irreverence or even outright malice because of his artificial nature and prickly bedside manner, making him another object of comic relief in many situations not unlike Data. The differences in his situation, however, lay in how he was made and for what he was originally designed.

Unlike an android, the EMH is a hologram, as his full title suggests. To create stable and usable programs like these, however, the holograms are templated after a real person (as seen in *DS9*), in this case Dr. Lewis Zimmerman. His appearance, mannerisms, and personality, especially early on, are nearly identical to the human after which he is modeled, creating a situation where others are forced to acknowledge that the EMH does in fact have emotions, even if he has to gradually expand and learn to identify them. Take, for instance, the seemingly coy way of describing the doctor in the script from the first episode where any comment on his expression is followed by comments such as "but that would be our projected feelings, wouldn't they" ("Caretaker" 36) versus the first episode of season three where he sees a member of the crew had sacrificed their life to save the ship, and gets an entire paragraph to describe his emotional response:

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[4] Some of the few scholars that mention EMH are the following: Kim Louise Parrent's 2017 Thesis on "Holographic Identity and Agency", Victor Grech's 2020 "Doctors in Star Trek", and 2020 "Conscious in Subroutines", J.L. Gittinger's 2019 *Personhood in Science Fiction*, Dennis M. Weiss' 2016 "Humans, Androids, Cyborgs, and Virtual Beings" and Nicole R. Pramik's 2016 "Photons (and Drones) Be Free."

He stops in mid-sentence… as he sees… and walks to Tuvok standing beside

Suder's body which has been brought to Sickbay and is on a bed… the Doctor

is devastated by this sight… he immediately moves to try and resuscitate

him… but as soon as he touches him he realizes Suder is gone forever… A

tear rolls down the Doctor's cheek. ("Basics" 54)

While the crew is initially confused by the display, he states, "It is not a malfunction. I've learned all sorts of new things while you've been away" (54), dispensing with the coy language of earlier scripts altogether and outright stating that he is learning how to process and display emotions, but not that he didn't have emotions in the first place. The crew, and even the EMH himself, weren't aware of the full extent of the personality he started with from his creator's 'template': for the purpose of this chapter this means that, unlike Data, the EMH displays emotion. The difference seems to lie instead with how he's treated.

The EMH's disability therefore is not centered in neurodivergence, at least not alone. Instead, it is his physical status that is disabled, as he is essentially tied to holo-emitters for life support, and this 'crippling' affects every aspect of his life. While within range of a computer and emitter, he is nigh indestructible since he is comprised of "photons and force fields" ("Someone to Watch Over Me"), and his 'brain' is tucked away in the computer, but the second any of the emitters stop, he tries to move beyond a certain distance, or the computers malfunction, his form vanishes. About a third through season three, he is connected to a mobile emitter, which additionally is only discovered because it was used to make him vulnerable enough to be taken as a hostage. This device though does not completely cure his mobility issues, nor does it 'save' him from the other effects of disability on an individual. When tied to the mobile emitter, he continues to face obliteration, as removal of it will cause his form

to vanish, and as his program is downloaded from the computer, not copied, damage to it would mean the end of his program entirely.

The doctor is, as Jeri Taylor describes, "following in the footsteps of characters like Spock and Data: an outsider who explores what it means to be human" (Robinsons 105). As another artificial character, EMH needed to provide a story different enough to entice a new audience, and so the EMH starts immediately with one key difference from Data: emotions and the means and desire to express them. Since the script of the pilot, his words were written as "dripping with sarcasm… as if [he's] saying, 'what kind of idiot are you?'" (Caretaker 106), and his actor Robert Picardo explained that he "borrowed [a] sense of injured merit from *Paradise Lost*. Milton describes the fallen angel Lucifer as having the sense that everyone in heaven didn't realize how swell he was as God's greatest angel. The reason why the doctor was so cranky was that he wasn't getting the respect that he deeply believed he deserved" (Robinson 106). The writers continue by suggesting this key difference between the EMH and Data can be seen in their interactions with humanity, "as Data saw himself as inferior while the EMH had no such doubts… He found his humanity by doubling down on what he believed in and not going back" (108). The doctor seeks out the knowledge and experiences he knows he lacks not to *become* equal, but to *prove* he's equal, clawing his way past the myriad barriers affecting him to balance out his "unevenly encultured" initial state, as stated by Victor Greck, who argues that the EMH mirrors early human development, while the show "serves as a Bildungsroman" (1). While I believe the Doctor mimics uneven enculturation and a sort of 'recovery' from that, in as much as one can after essentially being stunted in such a way and only haphazardly allowed to 'spread his wings,' it is exactly this

development of agency and its intersection with disability that this chapter will address.

While some may argue that EMH cannot be seen as having personhood because he is reprogrammable, he is only one copy of many, and he has no free will (Gittinger 94), or additionally, that his personhood then must apply to other characters on the Holodeck (95), Juli L. Gittinger in *Personhood in Science Fiction: Religious and Philosophical Considerations* argues that all of these assumptions can be challenged. In her book, she claims that we need to acknowledge computers, holograms, and other technological beings as being capable of personhood. Addressing the issue of EMH and others being programmable, she states, "One could argue that we are all programmable" (95), especially if one examines the numerous ways our behavior can be manipulated, such as with ECT, mental illness medications, cognitive therapy, lobotomies, and more. Additionally, EMH has clearly grown and "evolved beyond that original template into something unique" (95), something also noted and acknowledged by the crew and his own creator. A sign of personhood is arguably that humans continue to evolve and learn. Throughout the series, EMH grows, learns, and adjusts to circumstances, developing and inventing entirely new medical treatments and medications for the various emergency situations the ship's crew finds themselves in, going out of his way to create scenarios for himself in the holodeck, such as the experiences of family life ("Real Life") and illness ("Tattoo"), to be able to better interact with the crew. Evolving would not be enough for personhood without free will. Free will, Gittinger acknowledges, would be one of the harder arguments to rebut, but she questions the certainty of free will existing in the first place, let alone whether it "is even a condition for personhood" (95). Instead, she suggests a "sandbox approach to building our own personalities, testing out behaviors

and social circles, and growing into our selves as we live our lives" (95), which fits both human behavior and the doctor's over the course of the show. Finally, acknowledging EMH's personhood does not mean that all holograms must be considered persons. The other characters on the holodeck aren't created with the same complicated matrix that the EMH is, hence why he was such a remarkable creation and the first of his kind. He is impossible to replicate or replace by the crew. In "Message in a Bottle," the crew worries they will not be able to get the doctor's program back, which would endanger their lives. He is clearly seen as a unique personality. On the other hand, the characters in the holodeck operate very differently as they are run by a much more 'generic' program algorithm controlled by the ship's computer through compiling information on people and events and mimicking how they would act or respond. These characters do not learn and evolve from their circumstances, but instead only respond to possible storylines.

Finally, as Gittinger suggests, there are other arguments towards the doctor's personhood, such as the "outward perspective" where slowly "the Doctor's personhood is eventually attributed through outward factors-recognition and valuation by the crew, such that they eventually take risks in order to save his program and thus his life. The fact that his own life becomes equally valued to a human life is proof of personhood" (96). In fact, in one such episode, Captain Janeway must come to terms with her bias that keeps her from treating him as a person when she flat out tells the doctor, "You're malfunctioning, and you need to be repaired" ("Latent Image"). Seven[5] confronts Janeway later about "violating [the EMH's] rights as an individual",

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[5] Seven of Nine, or Seven for short, is a former Borg drone who was forcefully disconnected from the collective by Janeway and had to slowly learn/relearn how to be human, while also being in a position to "see the flaws in humanity" (Robinson 115), joining just as Kes' character left, and taking over the role of common questioning ground with the EMH. The Borg are a cybernetic hive mind, in search of

stating "your conclusion is wrong," but Janeway compares the EMH to a replicator creating a cup of coffee to explain why her decision was fine for the EMH, but not for Seven. Bringing up her status as a former Borg drone, Seven completely rejects this, bluntly delivering a scathing parting remark to prod Janeway into realizing her error:

> It is unsettling. You say that I am a human being and yet I am also Borg. Part of me not unlike your replicator. Not unlike the Doctor. Will you one day choose to abandon me as well? I have always looked to you as my example, my guide to humanity. Perhaps I've been mistaken. Good night. ("Latent Image")

The very next scene sees Janeway speaking to the EMH once more, stating, "I'd like to think I made my decision eighteen months ago for all the right reasons. The truth is, my own biases about what you are had just as much to do with it" ("Latent Image"), and she begins trying to help the doctor understand and work through his traumatic memories and mental breakdown as any other member of the crew. Thus, the EMH is shown to have personhood in the series itself, making it all the more important to question why he isn't *treated* like a person.

The EMH's relationship to power, agency, and other characters is, in short, awful. In Kim Louise Parrent's thesis that looks at holographic identity and agency throughout separate series, she argues that "the figure of the hologram represents a struggle for power, agency, and voice" and that they "journey towards agency and resistance against the hegemonic discourse of Starfleet… highlight[ing] the fictional disparities in power relations between the dominant and the marginalized within American science fiction television to demonstrate how this subjugation results in the

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perfection via assimilating everyone they came across to learn and advance themselves beyond the chaos of individuality (137).

silencing of the 'other'" (7). Their thesis focuses more on the other in terms of "race, gender, politics, and class" (10), but I believe this "other" can be translated to disability and able-bodied otherness too. If "humanity is an identity that invokes privilege, power, and superiority, and actively defines personhood" (268), then it makes sense that an identity that regularly struggles for those same things and is regularly dismissed or told it would be better without them would match up with the holographic beings. They are "particularly useful as a medium to study" because "its very nature is meant to fool the senses into believing that the individual is interacting with a real being" (10), doubling down on their artificial, read *fake*, nature that 'allows' organic beings to exclude and mistreat them because they 'don't count'. *Star Trek*, through the holographic character EMH, is able to throw into question the assumption that his artificial nature really makes a difference and deserves to be treated with respect, thus, providing the audience with a template to contemplate the 'others,' such as the individuals with disabilities, who actually are human, but are often dismissed and treated as inhuman.

At what point is an aid, a prosthetic, a helper, etc, too artificial for the disabled to still be considered human? The answer should be an obvious 'they are always already human,' yet history has taught us that this is far too often not the case. By starting the quest for humanity through a non-organic character, but showing the same paths, desires, and beliefs developing anyway, *Star Trek* encourages other human issues to also be studied from different angles. While Kim Parrent concludes that the EMH is "forced to maintain an unstable position of supposed acceptance masking inequality" (265) due to this artificial nature and its link to racial identity, I believe the EMH's position is more complicated because of his relation to disability, another disenfranchised identity category that is often ignored. The doctor is only able to

move, act, think, and be aware when linked to holographic emitters, usually either tied

through very limited locations in the ship or, later, with his mobile emitter. Stepping

outside these bounds or being separated from the emitter results in his immediate

disappearance till he can be reset, at best, and severe damage or complete loss of his

program at worst; this is, in essence, his life support, and the crew is hardly ever

concerned with making sure it works or increasing his mobility/access unless it suits

their needs. Thus, the EMH lacks the access of his peers, similar to the access issues

encountered by people with disabilities.[6] This lack of access leads to treatment that

excludes him and signifies him as "other."

Donna Reeve in her work on psycho-emotional disablism argues that lack of

access not only creates physical limitations but also psychological effects. As she

states, "psycho-emotional dimensions of disability would include being stared at or

patronized by strangers, actions which can leave disabled people feeling worthless

and ashamed and may end up preventing them from participating in society as

effectively as physically inaccessible environments ("Towards a Psychology of

Disability" 96). She goes on to explain that "for many disabled people, the experience

of being excluded from physical environments reminds them that they are different

and can leave them feeling that they do not belong in the places where nondisabled

people spend their lives" (97). These experiences are especially poignant early on

with the Doctor as he is regularly ignored, muted, or even deactivated with no

consideration of whether he was speaking or in the middle of something. His medical

genius and encyclopedic expertise seem almost negated by this disability, which

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[6] As explained in the Introduction of *Keywords for Disability Studies*, "identifying the body as *either* disabled *or* nondisabled is fundamental to many forms of social discrimination based on supposedly innate and 'natural' forms of bodily difference" (2), thus I will be using 'people with disabilities' and not 'disabled people' as the current writing seems to prefer.

becomes the only thing he's known for (made even more clear without so much as a

name), and his situation highlights important topics especially in psycho-emotional

aspects of the social model of disability that are being brought up today. His

participation in his community is extremely limited, and it takes quite a while before

that starts to change, though it can be argued that it never fully matches up to the

others, thanks to a lack of access at a fundamental level. And yet, it is his particular

disability again that allows him to save the day in some situations where his 'life

support' allows him to function in places others cannot, while not needing sleep, food,

or air, and while maintaining access to all the information of the ship and methods to

learn and upgrade himself as he grows. His quest for agency requires him to push

others, and the viewer, to consider access more like Titchkosky describes as "an

interpretive relation between bodies. …a way people have of relating to the ways they

are embodied as beings in the particular places where they find themselves… [and as]

to the social organization of participation, even to belonging… to be sought out and

fought for, legally secured, physically measured, and politically protected" (4).Thus,

in this chapter, I will argue that EMH articulates the challenges associated with

physical disability, including lack of access, disability as identity, and the psycho-

emotional disablism [7]faced by the disabled in regards to people with disabilities, and

through his quest for agency, he helps the viewers reframe their ideas regarding

access and disability.

I will use Reeve's ideas about the characteristics of psycho-emotional

disablism to frame my analysis of EMH. Reeve gives two kinds of psycho-emotional

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[7] "[U]sing the term *disablism* instead of *disability* makes explicit connections with other forms of social oppression such as racism and sexism" ("Psycho-emotional Disablism" 123); Carol Thomas and Donna Reeve both use this term and focus on its intersectionality.

disablism: direct and indirect. As the name suggests, direct psycho-emotional

disablism "emerges from the relationship that a disabled person has with other people

or themselves," whether it's on purpose or not, "often taking the form of acts of

invalidation or disavowal… [and] undermines self-confidence and self-esteem

because of the negative messages being received about self-worth and value"

("Psycho-Emotional Disablism" 123). Indirect psycho-emotional disablism,

meanwhile, "can arise from the experience of structural disablism… allow[ing] for

recognition of the emotional impact of being faced with an inaccessible building or

being denied information in accessible formats… of being reminded that one is 'out of

place'" (124). Specifically, I will be looking at examples of exclusion, jokes or stares,

poor quality of life standards/assistance, and the denial of personhood as examples of

direct psycho-emotional disablism. Furthermore, I will examine the physical

structural access issues, adjustments that are too undignified or humiliating to be

worth taking, the denial/inaccessibility of information, and the difficulty and toll of

passing as 'normal' versus being exposed as somehow 'lesser' as examples of indirect

psycho-emotional disablism. Each of these will guide my analysis of EMH.

Direct Psycho-Emotional Disablism

In order to argue this, however, EMH's own framing of his narrative and

growth, as well as what the Voyager crew believes about his growth, must be

addressed. At first glance, much of the EMH's development and story seem to fit

what may be considered cure or 'supercrip[8]' narratives: his mobile emitter allows him

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[8] One such definition is Joseph Shapiro's of the supercrip as an "inspirational disabled person […] glorified [… and] lavishly lauded in the press and on television" (qtd. in Schalk 73) while Eli Clare explains that these stories "reinforce the superiority of the nondisabled body and mind… turn[ing] individual disabled people, who are simply leading their lives, into symbols of inspiration" (2). While Schalk argues for "having a flexible theoretical framework to address supercrip representations and take seriously their ideological influences" (72), this goes beyond the ability for this chapter.

theoretical access to any location which 'covers' his disability, while his struggles all exist in the framework of success despite the setbacks and disruptions to normal life that his disability creates. When one looks at the broad strokes of his character, where he starts versus where he ends up, it is clear that he does, in fact, come a long way, and it is important to acknowledge that, especially as seen in the larger scope of when this was written and produced. By offering a brief overview of some of his scenes from the first episode, as well as comments from the actor himself and some of the writers, I will show the progression towards agency that EMH follows but also recognize the disablism he faces throughout his journey.

Early on, EMH struggles and shows frustration at his treatment by the crew. The scriptwriters describe EMH in the earliest scripts with dry, humorless language at best, or with no emotions at worst, and take pains to make it unclear as the first interaction with him in the first episode "Caretaker" shows: "[He] glances at Paris for a deadpan moment… you'd almost say that he's reacting as insulted… but that would be our projected feelings, wouldn't they" (36), and yet these moments constantly crop up, and despite the coy language, he clearly seems to be read as having emotions as he often shows exasperation, irritation, etc. We see this reaction to colleagues when we see EMH early on interacting with the crew. When everyone gets back from the Caretaker's Array, the introduction to the scene in sickbay starts with the EMH "clearly feel[ing] overworked" (Caretaker 108). Again, all advice, instructions, and warnings are ignored when he tries to get them to rest, and it isn't till "He watches in dismay as they all leave" and asks, "Is the crew always this difficult?" (108) that another officer, Kim, answers him, though even this is a bit of a joke as he says it is "[his] first mission" (109) and then leaves himself, making the EMH the only person left in the scene. EMH reacts with confusion and frustration, "find[ing] himself alone,

left on again. He calls after them, "Doesn't anyone know how to turn off the program when they leave?" (109). Ironically, this might be the closest the EMH gets to being treated like the rest of them at first, as they don't think about turning off the program just like they wouldn't think of turning off an individual. However, it mostly serves to alienate and isolate him, showing that even more than not thinking well of him, they often just don't think of him at all, and certainly not as anything more than they think of a medical tool.

The crew consistently treats the EMH as someone who can be dismissed and ignored, so his problem of being able to control his ability to turn himself on and off is ignored. While the idea of the EMH programming himself, or having the ability to at least turn his own program off when he's forgotten is brought up earlier ("The Cloud"), it's not until Kes [9]sees how the EMH is treated by the crew, and realizes that they'd rather talk to an alien they've only really just met instead of the medical program built and programmed by Starfleet, for Starfleet, that anything gets done. Kes attempts to change things by going to Janeway to tell her how the EMH's being treated, starting off by asking, "If there were a member of the crew… whose needs weren't being met… would you want to know about it?" (Eye of the Needle 29). When Janeway answers "Of course," seeming to jump to the conclusion that Kes and Neelix aren't being treated well, Kes corrects her and states that it is the doctor who isn't being treated well, a response that catches Janeway off guard. Kes tells Janeway

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[9] Kes is a member of a race with life spans lasting roughly 9 years, making her "designed to have a unique perspective on life and… to provide an unusual commentary on what it means to be human" (Robinson 97). She trains with the Doctor to be a nurse on board, as they're lacking in personnel and her naturally helpful nature makes her a natural. She becomes the Doctor's first 'community', in a way, and "was the first member of the crew to see him as a person rather than a tool", with another description adding, "She was naive about humans and he was also naive in many ways, and together they sort of discovered humanity" (99).

that others treat him "[a]s though he doesn't exist. They talk about him while he's standing right there… they ignore him… they insult him…" (30). As Reeve points out, these are all common complaints of people with disabilities when confronted by "disablism." When Janeway responds with "the other side of the coin" that "the crew have complained that the doctor is brusque… even rude. That he lacks any bedside manner" and follows up with stating that they've "been talking about re-programming him" (30), Kes immediately voices concern with whether that's right to do. Janeway states that he's "only a hologram", but Kes responds that "He's alive… He's self-aware… he's communicative… he has the ability to learn" (30). It is, of course, exactly these qualities that suggest EMH should be treated as a person. When Janeway points out that he has those capabilities because he's "programmed to do that," Kes asks the important question: "So because he's a hologram, he doesn't have to be treated with respect… or any consideration at all?" (30), to which Janeway has no answer. Kes' argument brings us back to Gittinger's claims about humans also being programmed, but most importantly, it forces the captain and the audience to question whether one deserves to be dismissed because one can only exist in specific spaces and does not have access to freely interact and form community.

This treatment by the crew affects EMH's view of himself, something Reeve argues is a product of disablism. When Janeway goes to sickbay to talk to the EMH, she discovers that he'd been turned off in the middle of running some tests to determine if someone is sick, something that would have been in danger of failing had no one happened to turn him back on. When she tries to just talk to him, and ask if there's anything he actually wants, he's baffled and doesn't fully know how to respond, finally offering that he'd like to be turned off when he has nothing to do, so that he's not sitting alone with nothing for hours. Janeway offers that they might be

able to simply give him control over that instead, a suggestion that stops the EMH in the middle of his work and causes him to stare at her in astonishment. When he's finally able to respond that he thinks he'd like that, and tells Janeway that he'll continue to think on whether there's anything else he'd need as a full member of the crew now, not just an emergency program, Janeway seems glad and leaves to her other duties. The script's notes on the EMH's actual response however, are very interesting. On the suggestion of being able to turn himself on or off, the script notes: "[He] is astonished. The idea of having that power would never have occurred to him. It will be -- as we'll come to see -- the first taste of blood" ("Eye of the Needle" 38). The wording brings to mind some sort of evil creature, perhaps like a shark from *Jaws*, that has tasted human blood and will never be the same after or will exact some evil design on humanity. The EMH never becomes 'evil' however, and it's important to note that blood itself is not intrinsically evil nor tied to wanting revenge. Blood is tied to life specifically, not death. Spilling blood is spilling life, which is what actually causes someone to become injured or die. In this sense, the EMH is actually having his first taste of life and is realizing that he doesn't have to settle for less, nor should he. If someone doesn't have the words to ask for something better, how could they? This idea ties into much more than just disability, but issues of race and gender. A taste of life often becomes the spark for someone searching for something more that they've glimpsed beyond their previously limited worldview. Kes did before, and now the doctor is given the start to do the same.

That taste of 'blood,' or life, helps the EMH in his next interaction with a crew member to be addressed as the Chief Medical Officer of the ship, spurring the crew to actually speak to him directly and begin to show him respect. When he leaves, the EMH tells Kes that Janeway has "made [him] realize that [he] must function as more

than an emergency medical replacement. [He] must think of [him]self as a member of the crew" ("Eye of the Needle" 65). By believing himself not just worthy, but actually, a member of the crew, he begins thinking of how to interact with both himself and others differently, asking for help and access to things he wouldn't otherwise have, and caring about himself enough that others will have no choice but to care for him too, as he proves that he is just as alive and worthy of life as they are. Even as he is "uncomfortable, clearly struggling with the new feelings of individuation and assertion" (65), he manages to ask Kes for another favor, this one being a name. As pleased as she is with this idea and move towards his own growth, he's never given one and is never able to decide on one for himself. As anyone who has ever had the responsibility of coming up with a name for a living being can likely attest, it is hardly an easy process, and while it does stray into the realm of humor or a running joke occasionally, it also helps mirror the EMH's journey into trying to re-envision himself and fully be a part of the crew, community, and family.

The issue, of course, is that he never truly *can* be part of the crew, community, and family because he still suffers from very specific markers and reactions that other him: markers that could place him in several disenfranchised communities, as suggested by Kim Parrent, but that I believe deserve a close comparison to those with disabilities. There are issues of access, physical and structural barriers, and multiple instances of what Donna Reeve has termed Direct and Indirect Psycho-Emotional Disablism throughout the show, and those are never solved. Even his 'successes' over his disability via the mobile emitter can be challenged, as will be seen, resulting in a much sadder overall tale for audiences of the show, but a much more realistic one, which can mean everything for visibility.

Indirect Psycho-Emotional Disablism

At its bare basics, no matter if it is before or after the mobile emitter, the EMH is connected to something that projects and stabilizes his image and matter in a way that lets him interact with the world; breaking that connection is the equivalent of either knocking him unconscious or killing him. That system is his atmosphere, and he can't go anywhere without it, but unfortunately most places don't have it. Holographic emitters are only put in places where a hologram is supposed to be, which normally would mean only in the holodeck, but the sickbay has the rare distinction of having an emergency program to try and help for a short while till the ship can get back to civilization. Thus, EMH finds most of the ship inaccessible.

When he gets his mobile emitter, that should be the end of the problem. Instead, it's more of a transformation of the problem, as while he can now go anywhere imaginable by other organics, and even some places not imaginable to them, he can still be forced in and out of his normal 'habitat' and the mobile one, and this is used both to the crew's and the audience's relief and amusement. He does also have control over this, but quite often we see him interrupted in what he's doing, or pulled away, frozen, and dismissed in the middle of an experiment or a procedure or a conversation, in a way that would be extremely rude at best and downright hostile at worst, which shows both one of the dangers of reliance on technology for his independence, as well as the sorts of subconscious, or fully conscious, behaviors the crew adopt towards him.

For instance, while the adjustments to the EMH are never actively meant to be humiliating or undignified, his issues are sometimes pushed aside as less important than other issues, arguable as this might be for a starship struggling to survive. *Star Trek* is usually known for its positive outlook on humanity's future, and due to the

specific actors utilized in *Voyager,* there are quite a few comedic turns to these heavy

episodes that might not exist in a *TNG* or *DS9* episode, but there are also quite a few

times where the EMH is either looked down on or looks down on himself. These are

hallmarks of the internalized direct psycho-emotional disablism that Reeve discusses

as "arising from the relationship a disabled person has with themselves. Negative

messages about the value and ability of disabled people can become internalized and

therefore impact on self-worth and self-esteem." ("Psycho-Emotional Disablism"

124). Even as late as season 5, Janeway likens the doctor to a replicator and has to be

shown by Seven that her own biases have affected her decisions regarding the EMH

("Latent Image"). In the last season, the EMH is questioned when he attempts to go

past or 'switch' from his medical position, be it temporarily or permanently

("Workforce"). When the difference in treatment is brought up, by him or by others,

the characters at fault may recognize their biases, but it rarely leads to serious

changes, and instead often seems forgotten. Thus, though *Star Trek* clearly addresses

the issue of differing treatment of EMH and even attempts to show the crew trying to

make changes to their behavior toward him or EMH's environment being altered to

help him gain more access, the show still fails to rid the starship of the disablism that

affects EMH.

Instead, even when he has his mobile emitter and seems to have no physical

barriers on board the ship, he faces direct psycho-emotional disablism every time he is

'exposed' or reminded what his physical condition is, which creates structural barriers

just as limiting as the physical ones from before. When he does get to participate in

ship-wide events, he's usually ridiculed or otherwise shown to be somehow lacking,

as his interests and how he demonstrates them often either don't quite click with the

rest of the crew or amuse them when that wasn't the goal ("Investigations"). Reeve

discusses how this disablism often is performed through making the disabled the butt of jokes ("Psycho-Emotional Disablism" 123). By using the disabled character for amusement, the media, Stuart Murray argues, often positions the disabled as "objects of consumption" (91). This is shown in the troubling history of freak shows, the abundant supercrip narratives, and, of course, the use of the disability as the basis for jokes. Garland-Thompson situates the depictions of disability in the long history of people with disabilities "being on display . . . visually conspicuous while politically and socially erased" (56). Thus, EMH and his disability become a joke to be consumed by the audience.

In order to produce the humor, the EMH must be objectified and his needs ignored. When he doesn't get to participate in events or situations, the crew usually doesn't prioritize helping him. Many times, his mobile emitter is either not working, or is being used for something else, and when the EMH asks for an estimate on when he'll have it back, he's either told there are more important things that need to be focused on or that he needs to stop being dramatic and needy. This attitude, of course, quickly disappears when there's a medical emergency, but always returns when the danger seems to be past, with him often being overridden or deactivated when others don't want to listen or follow his orders. In "Worst Case Scenario" for instance, the EMH approaches another character to offer suggestions and revisions of a novel that has been found half written, in an effort to continue his own creative growth. The response is not polite:

<div align="center">

Paris
I don't believe this

EMH
No thanks are necessary. In addition, I'm prepared to offer my
expertise in the creation of holographic mise-en-scene.

</div>

Tuvok
Computer, override the EMH program's autonomous controls
and transfer him back to sickbay.

EMH
Now, wait just a min- ("Worst Case Scenario" 30:10)

Immediately he fades from view mid protest, and is out of sight for the rest of the episode. Other scenes in episodes like "Concerning Flight" and "Drone" similarly show the EMH blocked out of discussions or otherwise returned to and stuck in Sickbay, causing him understandable annoyance and distress, while others don't seem to care.

He's routinely forgotten at best or ignored at worst when something's happening, commenting quite often about how he's the last person to know about something going on, as for instance in "Eye of the Needle" when the only person who actually seems to respect the Doctor is the one to tell him of their plans, though she thought he already knew. On being told, he "gives a slight sigh of annoyance. 'If there's one thing you can count on, it's that I am the last to be told about anything that happens on this ship'" ("Eye of the Needle" 50). As she explains it, the scene becomes quite upsetting, as the EMH (who is labeled Zimmerman in these early scripts after his creator, though never in the show) realizes he will be left behind:

Zimmerman
Well. I'll say goodbye now. I won't be
transporting with the rest of you.

Kes had not considered this. She stares at him.

Kes
But… can't we download your program
and take you with us?

Zimmerman
My program is fully integrated into the Sickbay
systems. At present I cannot be downloaded.

Kes is stunned by this unsettling revelation. She doesn't know what to say.
He turns away abruptly, dismissively. She hesitates, wanting to say something,
but not knowing what. Then, impulsively, she goes to him and kisses his cheek.

Kes
Thank you for everything. (51)

This is the first time he's been treated as an equal, or with any sort of respect, and though he seems to have trouble knowing how to react, he suddenly feels comfortable asking her for a favor. Not wishing to remain alone and online for the rest of his existence, he asks "If you do leave… before you go… would you-- check to make sure I've been deactivated?" to which Kes promises she will, though "Her heart constricts" at the request (52).

Several times, he seems to be the last person on board the ship, or realizes he soon will be. Early on in the series, especially before he gains his mobile emitter, his reaction to these scenarios and dismissive treatment is almost as if it's fine or 'normal' somehow, because he's merely a hologram. We almost never see a reaction. At most, he might offer a snide, "How kind of you" ("The Cloud") before getting to whatever he had to say, serving mostly as a comedic moment in the tense situation. It's not until he's given small measures of autonomy, such as being able to turn off his own program and 'sleep' as it were, that he seems to start questioning his treatment as opposed to the treatment of the rest of the crew. In one instance, he's asked, "Do you know what it is to be alone among many and unable to speak your fears?" ("Heroes and Demons" 28:30), and a sort of dawning discomfort seems to come over him as he frowns. When he offers that he does, and is asked, "How do you survive?" as the follow up question, he pauses, then responds, "I'm still learning how. I'm sure that's not very helpful" (29:10), looking down as he's forced to think about these matters for the first time: ironically, this is in a conversation with a character in the holodeck. He evidently doesn't feel comfortable discussing this with others, though it seems likely

that he may have off-screen conversations with Kes, given her support of him that allowed him to begin growing and gaining autonomy in the first place. His internalization of this and who he chooses to share his thoughts with seem to match with Reeve's explanation of internalized oppression, as she states, "this form of social oppression is often unconscious [and] can be difficult to challenge, especially when a disabled person is not exposed to more positive counter-representations of disabled people" ("Psycho-Emotional Disablism" 124).

Additionally, whether it's because he doesn't believe he deserves better, doesn't know he deserves better, or doesn't think anyone will help him reach for something better, he routinely has quality of life and personhood issues that seem to go beyond just being the character that the show uses to question humanity or what it means to be alive. When the crew needs some sort of specialized battery or energy source, they use his mobile emitter ("Gravity"). When the crew needs extra space or to put people somewhere, they use his sickbay ("Demon"). When they need to send a specialized message, or energy that could possibly let Earth know that they're still alive, they use him despite the risk ("Message in a Bottle"), and the list goes on.

He is also treated as expendable in many matters, except when it affects, or rather inconveniences, other crew members and their wants, leading to most of his clashes with the crew involving his attempt to grow or do something on his own time. Unsurprisingly, constant exclusion from normal activities and subjection to stares and jokes make it hard to fight for decent quality of life conditions. "Underpinning these practices are prejudices about the worth and value of disabled people's lives, that these lives are not worth living" ("Negotiating" 498) Reeve explains, and those assumptions lead to much worse actions such as being "marked out from the day [they] were] born as 'useless' and a 'burden' …[and] told there was no future for someone

with [their] condition" ("Towards" 102), all the way to "result[ing] in a 'Do Not

Resuscitate' notice being put on the hospital notes of a disabled patient" ("Psycho-

Emotional" 123). When the medical authorities, i.e. those with power, clearly don't

care about someone's quality of life, or even their continued existence, it makes it

clear why the general public doesn't work towards or even sometimes care about

disabled individual's quality of life. For the doctor, those experts are engineers and

holo-programmers, but the use of knowledge, power, and the assumptions that come

with it is the same. Unless something is affecting his ability to medically help the

crew, they seem more than happy to leave him in Sickbay alone, and once he gets his

mobile emitter, fixing that or making sure he can walk around the ship like the rest of

the crew is considered more of a luxury for him, it seems. Even Sickbay, the closest

he has to quarters of his own, hardly belong to him, if someone else decides their

quality of life needs it. Despite his complaints of both professional and personal

nature, in "Demon" he has to let Neelix and a few others essentially room in the

patient area of sickbay, stopping him from working, relaxing, or even singing to

himself. Control of his own personal quality of life is equally shaky, as he's hardly

given the right or allowed to make improvements to himself unless some outside

situation demands it. Thus, the EMH is treated as expendable and lacks control over

his own environment and quality of life. Recently, we have seen this same idea of

expendability of those that have disabilities in discourse surrounding the COVID-19

pandemic (Andrews, Ibrahim), which seems notable though the full impact of this

argument is outside the scope of this chapter.

When he does try to grow then, often for the good of the ship, but sometimes

just for himself, he's never helped. For instance, he programs a family for himself at

one point, before being told by the chief engineer that "they are ridiculously perfect.

No one has a family like this. This is a fantasy. You're not going to learn anything being with these lollipops" ("Real Life" 8:25). She then suggests she can fix the program to bring it closer to 'real life,' despite the Doctor's continuing confusion, but only after the audience has seen how comically perfect his family is. During another episode, his attempts to add to his program and "improve [his] performance as ship's physician" is summed up by the engineer as "messing around with your program," telling him he "can't just casually add subroutines into your program," and that she'll have to fix it but only after her shift ("Darkling" 9:40). With most of his issues, the crew state they're too busy or that the Doctor's idea is too ridiculous, when he can even get a reply from anyone at all. So he tries to improve on his own, either through experiences or reprogramming himself to gain new skills. These almost always backfire or aren't as effective as they could have been because he's denied the help and access to standard community knowledge and experience that everyone else on board has. The affected crew, or the ones with experience in the situation at hand, are then required to help him either undo the issue or fix whatever he did, sometimes for humorous effect in the episode, and sometimes as a warning of sorts to those who try to better themselves and shouldn't. This attitude, however, is always then undercut by at least one other character who questions the reaction and whether they're truly doing what is best or whether the EMH deserves better. Up to the beginning of season 4, this is usually Kes; after she leaves, it becomes Seven of Nine's position. While the doctor is able to argue for himself sometimes, it is others who usually have to carry on the torch to fully convince Janeway and the rest of the crew of the truth, as their arguments seem to carry more force, power, and believability than the EMH, despite his rank being one of only a few that can overrule the captain. His status as a hologram, as less than human, as an individual who is disabled, and as trapped away

from the community, stymies his power and creates problems in interactions except through specific people who are his direct community (Kes and Seven). He must rely on allies to speak for him to affect change.

Whether because of his inability to leave his designated 'areas' or because of the visible emitter later on his shoulder, the EMH is unable to fully hide his difference, his impairment, from anyone let alone the crew of Voyager that he works with. As Donna Reeve explains in some of her earliest work on psycho-emotional disablism, "someone who cannot hide their impairment is exposed to the assumptions of others and their impairment often becomes their most significant personal attribute" ('Negotiating' 499), and this is the doctor's chief problem from day one of activation. He is marked as other due to his restriction of both physical and social access because of his disability, literally and figuratively viewed as less than human in much the same vein as Yergeau's arguments. Despite his status as quite literally one of the most knowledgeable members of the crew, and possibly of anyone in Starfleet when it comes to medicine, as well as his rank of Chief Medical officer, the only thing usually acknowledged is his otherness, the "kind of being and moving that exists tragically at the folds of involuntary automation" (Yergeau 11). He is automatically relegated into a position of unimportance, of not having anything to add to a conversation, even when that topic is medical, and at worst, relegated to the position of a mere item "like a hypospray" ("Eye of the Needle") or a replicator ("Latent Image"). Reeve's explanations of what direct psycho-emotional disablism can look like or entail then, becomes more like a checklist of things the Doctor has experienced over the course of the show's run.

Because of his lack of access, exclusion is one of the Doctor's largest problems, and one of the easiest to see and identify with throughout the seven

seasons. "For people with physical and sensory impairments, the experience of being excluded from physical environments reminds them that they are different and can leave them feeling that they don't belong in public and private spaces" ("Psycho-Emotional Dimensions" 84) as Reeve explains, and the EMH is painfully aware of this. From his first appearance, he's excluded from senior officer meetings, even when the situation being discussed is medical in nature as seen in "The Cloud" when he's muted on the very call they brought him on. They continue the conversation without him when they do not like what he has to say. The next episode, "Eye of the Needle," sees him 'officially' recognized as the Chief Medical Officer after Kes sees how he's being mistreated and ignored, yet in the next season we still see him having to eavesdrop on the senior officer meetings that he should be a part of, and he is even reprimanded for it ("Parturition"). Though he later is given the power to shut himself off, this does not stop others from shutting him off in order to exclude him. This continues all the way to the end of the series.

While this exclusion was often used for humorous effect, especially early on in the show, this plays into another one of Reeve's explained sources of direct psycho-emotional disablism: jokes or stares. Jokes or stares are quite possibly the most widely spread 'direct' interaction a disabled individual is bound to face as a product and sign of Foucoult's power relations between people as "disciplinary power classifies and documents individuals and places them under continuous forms of surveillance; this power turns its subjects into objects of power/knowledge" ("Negotiating" 497). Ironically, the doctor has all of the medical knowledge, but none of the associated power. Instead, the jokes and stares result in, as Murray explains it, "positioning of the disabled as objects for consumption… placing disabled bodies on display (particularly in the historical freak show and its contemporary variants); with

inspirational and/or supercrip narratives; and with curiosity (itself frequently situated as a negative or ambivalent emotion in relation to disability)" (99). The curious gaze is always on the EMH, and as a result he and his knowledge are always expected to be on display, removing him from any power associated with that knowledge. Even the 'super crip' narrative leaves him no room to escape from this gaze, as the narrative is "understood as generating distance between disabled people and nondisabled observers/perceivers whose putative normality is shored up through the act of observing/perceiving" (Garland-Thomson 341). His failures or lapses in living up to these stares, then, leave him open to jokes.

These lead into possibly the largest form of direct psycho-emotional disablism that Reeves lays out: the outright denial of personhood. While this attitude might be endemic in all disenfranchised groups, "an important difference between the experience of disabled people and those from other oppressed groups in society is that the doctrine of 'separate but equal' is enshrined in law ("Psycho-Emotional" 90). That leads to the denial of personhood. Through Data, the *Star Trek* series was already certain in its idea that the synthetic organism still deserved some sort of personhood rights, but while these ideas are brought up near the series end of *Voyager*, the EMH never attains the same level of personhood as even the still lacking Data attained. Juli L. Gittinger goes through the most common arguments against the EMH's personhood and dismantles each, finally offering another, separate argument for his personhood via the "social" or "outward perspective" where "the Doctor's personhood is eventually attributed through outward factors- recognition and valuation by the crew" (96), but this comes as the Doctor removes or hides his disability markers and is never complete. Reeve again discusses the role technology plays in this disability management, stating plainly that "technology can never totally

remove impairment, but it can help reduce the effects of impairment" ("Cyborgs" 103). We see this clearly with the Doctor's mobile emitter, but Reeve predicts the problems this 'solution' has as well. "Like other forms of technology, obsolescence and monopolies are other potential problems and the more complex the assistive device is, the more likely one is to be tied into networks and institutions that support the device. Consequently, people with disabilities [would] become hostages to the machines that help them" (99), which is exactly the problem the Doctor struggles with from inception. Be it the ship or the more mobile but more vulnerable multiple emitter, the Doctor is always shackled to something just to live, and he never fully escapes the shadow that casts on his eligibility to be a person.

All of these direct actions against disabled individuals highlights the degree to which society assumes the disabled to be incapable of full independence as well as, less competent overall. Arnold S. Khan states, "Because people with disabilities cannot do some of those things done by people without disabilities, they are seen as incompetent, helpless, unproductive, and dependent on others for care" (516). Because of this stereotype, the disabled are often stigmatized and ignored in decision making. David Johnstone explains how the medical model of disability has led to a dualistic view of the disabled, where able-bodied people are considered superior, and people with disabilities are seen as unable and dependent (17). He further argues that these stereotypes "have been used to justify the assumptions that it is legitimate to do things to people with disabilities rather than attempt to do things with them" (17). This doesn't change in the future imagined by *Star Trek*, sadly, even as it is one of the most positive imaginations of humanity's future in existence. As Reeve comments, "even in the utopian dream of a world free from socio-structural barriers, psycho-emotional disablism would still be present within our society because of the longevity

of prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes about disability" ("Psycho-Emotional" 90).

The EMH is subject to these prejudices, and as a result struggles to be seen as competent and legitimate.

While direct psycho-emotional disablism "emerges from the relationship that a disabled person has with other people or themselves… indirect psycho-emotional disablism can arise from the experience of structural disablism" ("Psycho-Emotional" 124). This becomes one of the most common issues the EMH ends up facing, with negative experiences cropping up nearly every time he's on screen that highlight the structural and access difficulties intrinsic to his experience of disability. There is nothing on board built to allow the EMH to exist outside of sickbay, and even 'existing' seems more than he has, at first. For the most part, however, this is not the crew's fault, but an overall aspect of bureaucracy and access highlighted by Titchkosky in the book *The Question of Access: Disability, Space, Meaning,* as she notes that "access and inclusion issues are almost always addressed through bureaucratic processes" (8). As she describes, "the paradox of bureaucracy [can be] conceived of as a protection against personal arbitrariness while also inhibiting an organization's capacity to be responsive to the essentially irregular character that is human life" (9). As the EMH finds himself struggling against both physical and organizational structures too rigid to flexibly react to his existence and growth, the indirect psycho-emotional disablism that Reeve describes is the result.

Voyager's crew, however, can at least be seen trying to acknowledge and respond to these new realizations, giving the EMH a chance, if slowly and imperfectly, to have the same opportunities and access required to survive and grow in their long journey. Starfleet, the bureaucracy of the *Star Trek* series, makes no such efforts as the EMH sees when sent to try and deliver a message home in "Message in

a Bottle." Holographic emitters may have been installed everywhere on the prototype ship he finds himself on, giving him unprecedented physical access, but his entire program was replaced. As the Mark 2 EMH installed on that ship explains, the Mark 1 was declared "inferior" with "beady eyes [and] terrible bedside manner" (Message in a Bottle) and was replaced with this younger model. Of course, EMH is Mark 1. However, it is not until Voyager's EMH meets his original holomatrix creator, that he's given any specifics as to the process of his replacement. When the EMH meets Zimmerman, after begging Voyager's captain to allow him to be sent to the Alpha Quadrant to try to save his father figure, the scientist reacts by saying it must be a joke because the Mark 1 is "obsolete, extinct… [and] was reconfigured to scrub plasma conduits on waste transfer barges," and that he had already "been treated by the Mark 3, the Mark 4, not to mention the finest real doctors in Starfleet" ("Life Line") to no avail. It takes much prodding and pressuring for Zimmerman to finally explain that the Mark 1 had been labeled "defective" after it "failed to meet Starfleet's expectations" and that Zimmerman had spent 2 years trying to fix it before giving up and making the new matrices that would become the Mark 2 and so on ("Life Line"). As Zimmerman finally begins to realize that Voyager's Mark 1 EMH is capable and smart, his first instinct is again to cure the EMH's defects, though he notably lists "compassion, patience, empathy, [and] decorum" as the adjustments he wants to make, along with a sickly sweet greeting protocol meant to let him "overcome the inherent flaws in [his] personality subroutines" ("Life Line"). Of course, the unsaid suggestion is that the 'real people' didn't like dealing with anything but a cheerful program, much like Reeve's example of the "'grateful disabled person' role" that can cause more psycho-emotional harm to an individual ("Towards" 98). This is characterized as a person constantly having to portray themselves in a certain way just

to gain help working and moving around structural obstacles, as well as constantly apologizing preemptively to counteract the reactions of those who look down on someone needing help, even when, in reality, this is often an infuriating and draining requirement to simply needing help (98). EMH, similar to other people with disabilities, finds himself struggling to overcome the instinctively judgmental medical model view of him and his disability.

The pattern of being denied information, or people forgetting to even consider passing along information, however, is yet another sign of indirect disablism mentioned by Reeve. Neither are there even systems in place sometimes to get him information automatically, as other senior officers might have built in to the computer's automatic systems, because he's still 'just the EMH'. The crew is removed from the ship, or plans for that possibility, several times over the series, often leaving the Doctor to hear about some threat or potential way back to Earth either by accidentally overhearing someone or by putting things together after everyone's gone. As the series goes on, the structural issues and the biases are slowly shifted so that he is usually as in the loop as anyone else, however his storylines over all reveal several instances where he begins losing memories, has memories forcibly removed, or risks the loss of his memories for the good of the crew. These information, memory based facts, combined with the first major argument used in the show for his rights and status as an equal being his memory and ability to learn from it, shows an interesting sort of cautionary tale against stopping someone from experiencing the world and making new memories. Starfleet protocols and even the holographic version of Zimmerman the crew has to use to save the EMH's systems, in one instance ("The Swarm"), clearly tell them to wipe all of the extra 'useless information' for him to work properly, and yet he manages to retain or regain them at

the end of each episode, showing a strength in the 'useless' and a resistance to the indirect disablism that gives hope both to the EMH and to those watching.

 EMH's character and storyline confront the audience with physical and psycho-emotional obstacles faced by those with disabilities. EMH provides a needed representation of these struggles. Although the *Star Trek* series fails to provide a world without disablism, through EMH's journey to agency, it provides the viewer with hope for a new view of disability–one that discards the medical model and embraces a more complex view of the social dynamics involved in the lives of the disabled.

CHAPTER IV

Our Man Bashir: Bashir's Status as Focal Character on the Cure Narrative in

Star Trek: Deep Space 9

On July 5th, 1996, Dolly the sheep was born, becoming the first mammal cloned from an adult specialized cell, as opposed to an embryonic stem cell, and took the world by storm as this previously thought impossible feat opened up possibilities all throughout genetic science (Roslin). In 1997, the BBC declared "the dawn of the clone age" was starting amid these worldwide discussions and fears, the rise of IVF, and a treaty banning alterations of human genomes (Hogan and Decker 310), and this is reflected in the 1997 episode of *DS9* "Doctor Bashir, I Presume." During this time, parental and societal expectations for children's achievement and workload increased. To manage these unrealistic expectations to focus for long periods of time, children were diagnosed at a higher rate for ADHD and other learning issues, and parents used the diagnosis to give an edge to 'healthy' children by obtaining extra time on tests or Ritalin for better mental faculties (Sandel 59). "Overly ambitious parents" sought to demonstrate their love for their children by "promoting and demanding all manner of accomplishments from their children, seeking perfection" often through modern science (50), as science allows a control, or at least a belief of having control, of the world down to the individual, by scientists and laypersons alike. With these pressures mounting, "the age of the genome… [led] calls for a new 'liberal eugenics' by which they mean[t] noncoercive genetic enhancements that [did]not restrict the autonomy of the child" (75), arguing there was no difference between other tactics used for advantages and the genetic enhancements beginning to be available for the same goal. The "lingering moral qualm" (3) from this idea can be felt immediately, and Julian

Bashir's character and storyline have to be read in a certain light with this unease in mind.

Geraghty's assertion that this 'next generation' of *Star Trek* shows were wrestling with a new and different American society's values and beliefs seem obvious with all that is suddenly changing. The concerns of the past, present, and many potential futures are often topics for science fiction stories and characters, with disability being a long-standing concern and genetics being a newer concern but one that was suddenly exploding into now dizzyingly terrifying possibilities. Despite the relative infancy, or even the lack entirely, of the movements and schools of thought we have today, Bashir's character manages to show a surprisingly progressive and nuanced depiction of an individual coping with, working through, and fighting back against harmful cure narratives and ideas of ethics and belonging in a way many wouldn't have been able to see otherwise.

Unlike Data and The Doctor, Julian Bashir from *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* was born human but had mental and physical disabilities. These held him back so much, his parents had him genetically enhanced just before he turned seven, "out of love," so that they didn't have to watch their son struggle and fail, heartbroken, wondering if they had done something wrong ("Doctor Bashir, I Presume?" script 53). When Bashir finds out what had been done at age fifteen, he thinks it is because his parents were disappointed in him and thought him a failure, which doesn't actually get 'resolved' till almost ten years later. Since Khan Noonien Singh and the Eugenics Wars in *Star Trek*'s past, genetic engineering of the kind Bashir went through had been outlawed for hundreds of years, and his father eventually agreed to be arrested for two years in order for his son to be able to stay a doctor with Starfleet. Yet this 'punishment' highlights the problematic treatment of the field of genetic engineering

as the practice is outlawed, but exceptions are constantly made if the person displays the 'right' traits.

Bashir's circumstances are clearly interesting for a number of reasons, all surrounding his differently-abledness for better or worse. His treatment as a child with a 'problem' to be 'cured,' even if it meant using illegal research and methods, highlights debates throughout science, religion, philosophy, disability, and more, about the treatment of individuals and medicine. The fact that Bashir had no agency and didn't even know what had fully been done to him till he discovers it years after the fact also confronts ethics of medicine and disability, as decisions are often made for people with disabilities. In fact, the *Star Trek* canon is largely based on a cure narrative, which constructs able-bodied people as the cultural and social norm. As Wälivaara states, "This ableist normativity is evident in curing narratives that perpetuate able-bodiedness as a state of normality; thus, stories of disability inevitably focus on overcoming one's disability and returning to 'normality.' This, in turn, perpetuates an ableist view of disability as something that not only can but should be cured" (1041). Closely tied into this is the 'curative imaginary' which creates a future "framed in curative terms, a time frame that casts disabled people (as) out of time, or as obstacles to the arc of progress" (Kafer 28). These assumptions push the idea that there is no future for people with disabilities: they either must be cured, or they must cease to exist. Yet, through the character of Bashir, these narratives seem to be questioned.

Moreover, as Wälivaara explains in her deconstruction of Darth Vader, "While he is cured of his physical injuries, he remains disabled. It is not the technological alterations to his form that makes him strong—rather, it is his use of the Force" (1040). In much the same way, Bashir is still disabled, despite being 'cured' of his

slowness. Either despite, or because of, these changes made to Bashir, he often shows ADHD and other neurodivergent tendencies, though arguably less traditionally pronounced when compared to Data. As Yergeau cautions, I wish to avoid turning "traits and check boxes" and "symptoms" (2) into the focus, but generally this is seen in the contrasts set up between him and other characters, with him as the one somehow contrasting the 'normal' other, as well as his peculiar relation to his own rhetoric or narrative. The question then becomes what is making him the capable and critical medical officer he is. While his drive and passion for medicine cannot be ignored, arguably his ADHD tendencies play an even larger part of what makes him the driven, eclectic, and invaluable officer he is, though it takes quite a while for the others to accept him as such. This, combined with his youth, means he is disliked or even hated by both characters and audiences, and once again, used as comedic effect many times over, even before his genetic engineering was an idea the writers were considering. Thus, while his parents start out attempting to "cure" Bashir, the end result still leaves him alienated from his peers and differently- abled. Thus, by illustrating the immorality and impossibility of the cure for Bashir, the series calls into question the cure narrative. Therefore, in this chapter, I will argue that the character of Julian Bashir critiques ableism, cure mentality, and medical ethics in regards to people with disabilities.

Twenty-five years after *DS9* first aired, Ira Steven Behr, *DS9's* showrunner and executive producer, pushed for and helped create the documentary *What We Left Behind: Looking Back at Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. He managed to raise enough funds from donations to reconvene the actors, writers, other directors, and even artists, CGI, and the original musicians to discuss the memories they shared, the goals they had attempted to achieve, whether they had achieved them, and what *DS9* might look

like today given the radically different society and time passed. Two hours is hardly enough time to discuss everything, a fact they lament in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, but this (mostly) current look backwards serves as a perfect starting point, I believe, for a discussion that is already taking current theories, beliefs, and contexts and looking backwards at this series. On Julian Bashir, the character's actor Alexander Siddig gives the incredibly succinct statement that the character "was too immature. Intellectually far more cooked than he is emotionally" (1:26:20). Behr eventually adds that it wasn't until "finally in season 7" that they wrote "a love story for Bashir that worked" (1:26:30), joking, somewhat, about the amount of time it took for Bashir to be fully accepted, in a sense, into the same level of friendship and heteronormativity the other characters had achieved, and by proxy, to be fully accepted by the audience as a full and proper individual. This comment, interestingly, is given just after a quote from a season 1 episode, "The Storyteller," is played, and Bashir, after asking for an honest answer on whether he was annoying the Chief Engineer Miles O' Brien, continues: "I mean, the only reason I brought it up is because your opinion means a lot to me, and I'm aware I have a tendency to run off at the mouth sometimes… I suppose it's a nervous habit. I hope you don't hold it against me" (script 7). In response to the question, O'Brien bluntly replies, "Not at all, Sir" (7), using rank to provide distance and dismiss Bashir, perceiving him as rambling, bouncing between topics. Bashir is self-aware enough to recognize his own rambling, as well as O'Brien's less-than-truthful reply. Emotional maturity may certainly have been one of the things Bashir needed as the circumstances around *DS9* forced him to 'grow up' quick as someone literally fresh out of the academy, but neurodivergence seems just as likely, if not more so given his past that the other characters and the

audience didn't yet know of. That full story wasn't given till season 5, when it came

out like a bomb shell that forces all his previous behavior to be reconsidered.

In episode 16 of season 5, titled "Doctor Bashir, I Presume?", Bashir is

revealed to have been given genetic enhancement as a child, despite its illegality,

because he was developmentally behind other children at his age. With it, he ended up

surpassing them and becoming superhuman instead, only understanding fully what

had been done to him almost 10 years later at the age of 15, leading to an,

understandably, rocky relationship between him and his parents. Despite his father's

comments that "genetic engineering is nothing to be ashamed of" and that Bashir isn't

"any less human than anyone else. In fact, [he is] a little bit more" (script 42), Bashir

realizes that the changes have made him unable to fit in. Furthermore, they had kept it

a secret still for nearly 25 years due to the fear of prison. When O'Brien talks to

Bashir, asking, "Then it's true? You're…", Bashir replies, "The word you're looking

for is 'unnatural'. Meaning 'not from nature.' 'Freak' or 'monster' would also be

acceptable" (script 45), an unfortunately common internalized belief around disability

too and telling in its inclusion here despite his being 'cured'. Overall, Bashir ends up

describing his experiences such:

> Bashir can't meet his eyes and sits down heavily on the
> couch. The jig is up and there's no running away from
> who he is any longer. The words come tumbling out of
> Julian -- it's a story he's never told anyone, but
> always thought he might, and once he starts, there's a
> rushed anxious quality to the tale as if he's glad to
> finally say it.

>   BASHIR
>   I was six. Small for my age. A
>   bit awkward physically. And...
>   not very bright. In the first
>   grade, while the other children
>   were learning how to read and

write and use a computer... I was
still trying to tell a dog from a
cat and a tree from a house.
>   (beat)
I didn't really understand what
was happening... I knew that I
wasn't doing as well as my
classmates... there were so many
concepts they took for granted
that I couldn't begin to master...
but I didn't know why. All I knew
was that I was... a great
disappointment to my parents.
>   (beat)
I'm not sure when they made the
decision, but just before my
seventh birthday we left Earth for
Adigeon Prime.
>   (beat)
At first, I remember being excited
at seeing all the aliens in the
hospital. But then they gave me
a room... and started the
treatments... and my entire world
began to change…

Bashir trails off, lost in the memories for a moment
until O'Brien gently pulls him back.

>   O'BRIEN
> The treatments? Some kind of DNA
> recoding... ?

>   BASHIR
> The technical term is "accelerated
> critical neural pathway formation."
> Over the course of the next two
> months, my genetic structure was
> manipulated to accelerate the
> growth of neuronal networks in my
> cerebral cortex. A new Julian
> Bashir was born.

>   O'BRIEN

> In what ways did they... change
> you?
>
> BASHIR
> My... mental abilities were the
> top priority of course -- my IQ
> jumped five points a day for over
> two weeks. That was followed by
> improvements in my hand-eye
> coordination, reflexes, vision,
> stamina, height, weight -- in the
> end everything but my name was
> altered in some way. (46)

Ever the good friend, O'Brien tries to tell Bashir that he's "not a fraud… genetic recoding can't give you ambition or a personality or compassion or any of the things that make a person truly human" (script 47), though the heartfelt comfort doesn't change the law, as Bashir immediately points out: "Starfleet medical won't see it that way. DNA resequencing for any reason other than repairing serious birth defects is illegal. Any genetically enhanced human being is barred from serving in Starfleet or practicing medicine" (script 47). The wording Bashir uses brings up an interesting though confusing point: what is considered a 'serious birth defect' in *Star Trek*'s future society? How 'disabled' does a person have to be before it counts as 'severe' and how could one even measure that?

While perhaps some level of mental disability or neurodivergence would eventually fit into the 'severe' category, the next conversation between Bashir and his parents seems to, if not completely rule out, then cast additional severe doubt on whether his initial condition would have counted. His father, angry with Bashir for not agreeing to come up with a plan to fight the coming punishment, states, "You're so smart, you know so much that you can stand there and judge us. But you're still not smart enough to see that we saved you from a lifetime of remedial education and

underachievement!" ("Doctor Bashir, I Presume?" script 52). Bashir rightly points out

that his father didn't know that for sure, as he was never given a chance, and when his

father responds that Bashir was falling behind in school, his son erupts, "I was six

years old! You decided I was a failure in the first grade!" before eventually

continuing, "Jules Bashir died in that hospital because you couldn't live with the

shame of having a son who didn't measure up!" (script 52). While his father is

stunned by this realization of how Bashir feels, his mother steps in at this point to

begin explaining their side of the story, emotionally relaying how Bashir can't know

how hard it is "to watch your son… fall a little further behind every day… to know

that he's trying, but something's holding him back… worrying that maybe it's your

fault… You can condemn us for what we did… say it was illegal or immoral

whatever you want to say… but you have to understand that we didn't do it because

we were ashamed… but because you were our son and we loved you" (script 53).

Notedly, the script direction for the scene that follows her explanation specifies "…at

least in this issue, [Bashir] misjudged them… They haven't resolved their problems,

but at least the air's been cleared" (script 53). In the end, Bashir's father is punished

for making the decision to have his son enhanced, finally taking responsibility for

himself as has been implied he always avoided, and Bashir himself is allowed to keep

his job and stay in Starfleet with no repercussions, promising even to visit his father

and thanking him. Though their last dialogue is awkward and filled with pauses and

sentence breaks, showing they still have many problems to work through, it's also

implied that the healing can at least start.

Overall, then, Bashir's story becomes such a balancing act between and

against common rhetoric and tropes surrounding dis/ability, that it never really falls

into any one message, and instead forces multiple rereadings both of this episode and

his actions in all the others. Just when it seems to settle into the 'cure narrative'

rhetoric, we find it may have been less about curing, and more about improving,

something Michael Sandel points out people often find moral fault with, but may not

totally know why (12). Even on top of that, the 'cure,' if it is a cure, doesn't create

neurotypicality, as Bashir shows signs of neurodivergence all the way back to his

distracted, flighty ramblings, lack of social awareness, often flipping into hyperfocus

and savant levels of medical problem solving when the episode needed it. However,

in *Star Trek*, savant type mental illnesses are often not seen as needing a cure, and

instead seem to almost suggest the enhanced super human. Bashir's father illustrates

this as he claims his son is "a little bit more" ("Doctor Bashir, I Presume?" script 42)

human than everyone else. What's striking about this statement is that Bashir's father

claims this even as he recognizes his son's neurodivergence, which would typically be

viewed as disability.

Bashir's character certainly isn't an argument totally for genetic enhancement

either, as the specter of Khan and the Eugenics Wars constantly lingers over every

conversation and decision, and yet his father only receives two years in a "minimum

security penal colony in New Zealand" (script 55) for flouting a law put into place to

stop future generations of tyrants, genocide, and wars from taking place. Bashir's

struggles with himself, his parents, and society itself mirrors that of a great many kids

who grew up in gifted and talented programs only to eventually buckle from unnatural

pressure and the neurodivergences that often accompanied the intelligence but was

ignored because 'success' was more important. Bashir bitterly comments on this

specifically in this episode, stating, "There's no stigma attached to success" (script

47) when O'Brien marvels that no one suspected anything. This episode acts as a

transition in Bashir's character development and story, as before this episode there

were no plans for Bashir to be genetically enhanced, or any backstory at all, and afterwards everything had to be written with this in mind. Far from its liminal status somehow weakening the story and Bashir's character as a whole, however, it provides one of the strongest points to start looking at the topic of disability throughout Bashir's arc and *DS9* as a whole, and critique a great many assumptions of the time, which are still with us today.

The idea of 'curing' disability is unfortunately so common in stories overall, let alone science fiction, that it has "become part of our larger cultural construction of disability" (Allan 9). As Allan explains:

> So dominant is the concept of curing any instance of perceived disability, DS [Disability Studies] theorists return to it repeatedly, giving cure a twofold meaning. The first evocation of cure is the most obvious, common in both medical discourse and fiction, as in "curing" or "fixing" the disabled body of its perceived lack of normality and health. The second use of cure reframes the discussion of disability in SF [Science Fiction] texts by moving away from a simple determination of whether a disability is being represented as in need of cure to a more expansive and critical consideration of how the cure narrative is performing in that text. In other words, what does it mean to cure the disabled body, what are the cure's outcomes, and are they desirable? (9)

Bashir's 'cure narrative' is clearly more complex than the first definition of cure, suggesting we should focus on how that narrative functions in the show. This questioning of the cure narrative almost seems written into the character and story on purpose, which would constitute a radically different intent than most science fiction, especially mainstream science fiction, of the time, and even today.

Whether it was the only possible cure or not, genetic engineering and enhancement was the cure used, likely because 'in universe' it's hinted that this was the option most likely to succeed as a cure for Bashir's assumed limitations, and 'out of universe' because of how the rapidly advancing science had propelled the topic, and society's hopes and fears, into the sudden spotlight. In this case, it seems the cure was more of a 'cure all,' as the changes weren't limited to Bashir's IQ. Whether this is a suggestion that the mind and body are too interlinked to enhance one without the other or a suggestion that the entire human body needs 'curing' in some form or fashion (which would be quite a dark idea for the *Star Trek* universe) or something else entirely, the outcome for Bashir was essentially what Sandel describes in *The Case Against Perfection* as 'liberal eugenics.' Those that hold this stance argue that "noncoercive genetic enhancements that do not restrict the autonomy of the child" (Sandel 75) allow a person to live their best life, and so might "therefore not only [be] permissible but required as a matter of justice" (77), so long as "the enhanced capacity is an 'all-purpose' means, and so does not point the child toward any particular career or life plan" (78). This ignores the fact that the very procedure itself on a child who cannot understand what's happening "violates the liberal principles of autonomy and equality" (80). Though Bashir himself states that "everything but my name was altered in some way" ("Doctor Bashir, I Presume?" script 46), which certainly sounds like it is closer to an 'all-purpose' enhancement than anything that would influence Bashir's future life plan, Bashir didn't understand what was being done and had no choice in the matter, marking his parent's actions as coercive and harmful to his autonomy, no matter how well meaning they may have been.

The actual outcome isn't as complete as it seems however, as I mentioned before, with Bashir still displaying potential 'slowness' in his emotional growth and

understanding, especially when he first comes aboard, as well as potential attention and hyperactive tendencies that would likely be diagnosed as neurodivergent or disabled between the show's airing and today. To make matters more complex, Bashir displays a number of the negative outcomes Sandel quotes or predicts for the child or adult if this type of enhancement were to take place. Not only do parents "inevitably incur a responsibility for their children's lives that cannot possibly be reciprocal" (Sandel 80), and so "disfigure the relation between parent and child" (46), but the advanced person "cannot regard themselves as the sole authors of their own life history" (80) and so " [their] achievements would be those of [their]inventor" (26), as the enhanced person can no longer "consider [themselves] responsible—worthy of praise or blame—for the things [they] do and for the way [they] are" (25). Bashir's descriptions of himself as "unnatural… freak or monster… a fraud" ("Doctor Bashir, I Presume?" script 46) during his personal explanation to his best friend of what happened, and his surprisingly common downplaying of his talent or abilities especially in episodes before this one, seem to push this negative belief he holds quite strongly. All of this feeds back into Yergeau's "demi-rhetoricity… a horrifically useful strategy for denying the agency, rhetorical being, and personhood of autistic people" (32). The loss of control he has over his own story, and so his selfhood and perspective of his past, present, and future, persist even after his 'curing'. If this is indeed part of the inescapable outcome of this 'cure', *DS9* seems to be telling its viewers that the very idea of this sort of 'cure' might not be as desirable or ethical as one first thinks.

Rereading Bashir's Past

Bashir's story is further complicated by the new understanding of his past, which is suddenly looming. How does our new understanding, or at least new considerations, change the reading of Bashir's previous actions and previous DS9 storylines that touch on themes of disability? As mentioned before, most of Bashir's earlier dialogues and encounters with the other characters, such as in "The Storyteller" with O'Brien, already held hints of neurodivergence, and rereading those scenes with his own hidden past and current genetically engineered state has the potential to complicate disability rhetoric even further. Bashir's questions to O'Brien of whether he annoys him, explaining his tendency to ramble, and then apologizing preemptively ("The Storyteller" script 7), almost read more like someone trying to make an excuse or cover story to keep themselves hidden and under the radar in case they slip up later, or at least prepare the Chief in advance so he doesn't raise red flags if that were to happen. Considering they become incredibly close friends only a couple seasons later, and that friendship then survives Bashir's past being suddenly exposed, it seems to work.

Most mentions of Bashir's past hold very interesting inconsistencies, but when reread with his past in mind, somehow a more consistent frame is created again around his motivations. This is especially evident in the episode "Distant Voices." The antagonist named Altovar is telepathically in Bashir's mind, and in an effort to demoralize the doctor and make him give up, he brings up choices and mistakes from his past. Specifically, he references Bashir's turn from tennis to medicine, his single mistake on the final exam that made him second in his class instead of first, and his interactions with the Chief Science Officer Jadzia Dax. With each of these, Bashir states his explanation of events, before Altovar pushes back with a different reason he

argues is actually the truth, as he's inside the doctor's head and can tell he's lying. When Bashir states he wasn't good enough to play tennis professionally, Altovar responds that Bashir was, but stopped because his parents wouldn't approve; when Bashir states it was a simple mistake on his final exam, Altovar responds that they look nothing alike and so Bashir must have answered wrong on purpose, not wanting the pressure of being ranked first in the class; and when Bashir states that Dax and he are just friends, Altovar responds that he knows Bashir likes her, and he could have had a relationship if he "tried a little harder. But you'd rather give up than fight, wouldn't you?" ("Distant Voices" script 50), which hammers home the tone and angle for all of Altovar's arguments.

Bashir further clarifies each of those points during the finale against Altovar, arguing now primarily against the idea that he gives up or doesn't fight for himself or against his problems:

> I do have feelings for her, but the important thing is... she's my friend. And I wouldn't trade that friendship for anything. And as far as my career is concerned... I may have been a good tennis player, but I'm a great doctor. Maybe I could've been first in my class, but it wouldn't have made any difference in my life. I still would've chosen this assignment. This is where I belong. ("Distant Voices" script 52)

This episode is before there was any idea Bashir was genetically modified at all, but interestingly he still accepts at least part of what Altovar is saying as truth, and nothing he says precludes or contradicts what we later learn, either. In fact, by rereading with his past in mind, we see an individual under a lot of societal pressure and potential scrutiny. If someone wants to hide the full extent of their knowledge or capabilities, the easiest way to do so would be to let someone else 'go first,' so to

speak: to not be perfect. 'Luckily,' in this case then, he has his very obvious familial trauma and neurodivergences, either still present or created, to lead people to think less of his potential. A doctor in the middle of nowhere is much less likely to be under constant scrutiny than a first-in-class, professional tennis player and doctor would be.

Aside from dialogue and Bashir's own personal claims before his status is revealed, however, there is also one of the largest disability episodes *DS9* had titled "Melora" for the character in question. Ensign Melora Pazlar is a cartographer, meant to help chart out the Gamma Quadrant from the Bajoran wormhole. She is also an Elaysian, a species that evolved on a low gravity planet, and so struggles with mobility in heavier gravity, effectively giving her a disability. She's the first Elaysian to join Starfleet, meaning they're still working out special accommodations in a general sense, but thanks to *DS9's* Cardassian design, it's even less accommodating, requiring her to use braces and a wheelchair instead of her normal anti-gravity solution ("Melora" script 1). Hanley Kanar's scathing look at this episode, while certainly correct on some of the problematic attitudes and beliefs shown, also leans toward what seem to be greatly exaggerated all-or-nothing beliefs. She suggests Melora is treated no better than the 1960s *Star Trek*'s Pike (251), glosses over the fact that the station is Cardassian made, not Starfleet, which is an explanatory reason for the inaccessibility if one knows anything at all about their beliefs and standards (252), and assigns all of the various character's discomfort or confusion while trying to accommodate Melora as willful refusal to do any more than the minimum instead of questioning or looking for any other reasons (253). Most importantly for my purposes, however, is the complete lack of acknowledgement that Bashir, even technically, both held and holds a disabled status. His words, actions, and beliefs hold significantly different potential meanings when read in this light.

To Bashir, someone who was given no choice in being 'cured' and altered, who didn't even understand what had been done to him till after the fact almost ten years later at the age of fifteen, and who now had to hide his past and current neurodivergences for fear of being discovered, Melora's refusal to change and her use of only the bare minimum of accommodations must have seemed incredible. Problematic as the trope of the 'super-crip' is, it makes sense why he would immediately seem to sing her praises and claim "she's extraordinary" ("Melora" script 3) for all this, especially as Bashir often risks being placed in this trope category himself. Wanting to avoid any "special attention" (3) and just be is a completely understandable goal for most people, let alone those stigmatized or otherwise 'othered,' and is a goal that would be especially important to Bashir. This, combined with his work as a doctor and drive to help people offers a compelling counter-argument, or at least complication, to his actions being a simple "assumption… that he knows better what she needs than she does" (Kanar 255). When he makes an adjustment to Melora's wheelchair to try to give her better access and mobility to the still largely inaccessible station, he doesn't seem "scripted to sound placating rather than apologetic when he offers to convert it back to the original design" (255). His character's only script direction and dialogue is "(embarrassed) It's… really no problem. I can replicate the other design" to which Melora, with no script direction, merely has the response "No, I'll just have to adapt" ("Melora" script 3). He's clearly made a mistake, yes, but it seems more the mistake of an overeager sympathetic soul, not a holier-than-thou doctor that views her "as a malcontent" (Kanar 255).

In fact, it seems he might understand her anger a great deal, as he says nothing during the confrontation with Commander Sisko, Dax, and Melora, and instead waits till later to talk to her in private about her manner of speech. She assumes he's come

requesting an apology for her earlier statements questioning the need for Bashir to be involved, stating her "speech was not intended to attack you personally" ("Melora" script 15). His response, seeming genuinely concerned visually and labelled "(not mean, with charm)" in the script, addresses this directly, saying, "I'm sure you never set out to attack anyone personally. But you do seem to attack a lot" (15). After she calls him insensitive and snaps that Bashir has "decided [she] needs a friend" (15) almost like another prescription or cure, he doubles down on what he's seeing from her: "Of course you mean to… all of these broad shots you fire—it's your way of keeping the rest of the universe on the defensive. Has to be. You're too good at it" (16). She only partially admits he's correct, not seeming to want to give up the independence she's so adamantly clung to thus far, and the script even notes that "she studies him a long beat. No one has ever nailed her like this before and it makes him intriguing to her" (17). The reason he seems to understand when no one else has certainly suggests that he may have dealt with, or be dealing with, something similar, with that something being his parents, as we see in season 5. There are quite a few 'broad shots' in their dialogue before it breaks down completely and the truth gets out, but during the time Bashir is meeting Melora, he's still fighting to maintain his own independence from them, from the shadow of what was done to him and what differences still remain, and the effect that pressures to conform both had and still have on him.

The dialogue of cure is another topic that Bashir would have no choice but to be well acquainted with, from both sides of the equation. Importantly, it's not "while she's being attended to by the doctor" (Kanar 257), but in the next scene, as he's walking with her to her quarters and they've presumably been talking about various topics, that Bashir brings up work done by another scientist 30 years ago on low

gravity species. Cure or not, it makes sense as something Bashir, a scientist-doctor, would bring up to Melora, a scientist herself who could have been personally affected by that breakthrough. Clearly, he would also want to help her, considering the pain, anger, and longing for independence she goes through, as doctor, Starfleet Officer, and friend, and I won't argue the problematic if well-meaning jump to cure should rightfully be questioned. However, instead of pushing this belief on her against her will, as was done to him, or promising something he can't be sure would work fully or without other side effects, again as done to him, he broaches the topic, gauges her interest, and truthfully admits that the idea is all still "theoretically…perhaps" ("Melora" script 28). It isn't until later, after her first cartography mission, that Bashir has any models and research that prove it could work. With all the hyper focus on an ADHD man in love, Bashir took the 30-year-old body of work that had "no practical success at all" (27), adapted and updated it "with the development of neo-analeptic transmitters in the last decade" into not just a model, but a ready to use therapy, claiming "it's not even that complicated" (36). On her equal parts stunned (36) and happy ("Melora" 27:46) reaction, they proceed to test it. Her reaction to it working is nothing short of delight, as even when the first treatment starts to wear off and Bashir helps her back to her quarters so she can let her body rest, "She sits down, tired but delighted" ("Melora" script 44). When he leaves however, it's clear she's starting to have some doubts about not being able to fly again, which translates into their next scene as she asks, while "(trying to make it sound in passing) Exactly when does it become irreversible?" (47). The script gives a particularly key bit of stage direction here for Bashir, stating, "and Bashir hears that word, 'irreversible'… and it's the kind of thing a good doctor picks up in a patient's voice," continuing a couple lines later with, "a good doctor doesn't let it go" (47), as Melora tries to brush off the worries.

Of course, most anyone with a form of disability, and even many with common medical concerns or complaints, know that a 'good doctor' doesn't always pick up on those concerns, or even view them as valid concerns, let alone pursue them to comfort a patient. Even beyond this, he fully lays out the pros and cons of taking or not taking the treatment, and even gives her a time frame in which it's still reversible, so that she knows how long she has to make this decision–all accommodations he wasn't given before his irreversible cure. After thinking on it, and saving the day with her anti-gravity skills, she tells Bashir that she won't continue the treatments, prompting him to "react, a little disappointed" ("Melora" script 60), but how could he not when realistically this means she'll want to get her work done quickly and leave, instead of them spending more time together? His disappointment seems to stem more from this 'break-up' however, and the loss of someone who perhaps understands him as well as he understands her, and not from "his desire to 'fix' her" (Kingsbury), or else he would have argued or pushed back on Melora's decision from some medical standpoint. Instead, in an understanding that might seem to go against his stances on helping or saving people's lives in other episodes ("Life Support", "The Wire"), but makes much more sense for someone who believed he had been stripped of everything that had made him who he was without consent, he simply nods and tells her, "you can always try it again someday if you change your mind" ("Melora" script 60). Simply put, the idea of a cure was weighed against Allan's questions of "what does it mean to cure the disabled body, what are the cure's outcomes, and are they desirable?" (9), and it was found wanting, not only by 'the-disabled-to-be-cured', but also by 'the-doctor-who-would-cure', a complication I believe is much easier to see and identify the importance of when Bashir's own 'future-history' is read back into the episode.

The Future Read Through the Present

That doesn't mean, of course, that there aren't episodes after Bashir's reveal that don't also deal with this topic, and even others like him. The episode "Statistical Probabilities" introduces four characters whose parents had also had them genetically enhanced as children, but had "unintended side effects", so that "by the time they were five or six years old, their parents had to come forward and admit they'd broken the law so their children could get treatment" (script 14). Commander Sisko and Bashir himself suggest "they waited too long" to do so and that "there wasn't much the doctors at the Institute could do for them—cases like theirs are so rare there's no standard treatment" (script 14). This directly tells us several things, and indirectly implies a few more. Directly, the fact that Bashir didn't end up 'like them' was only because his parents "found a decent doctor… those four weren't so lucky" (13), given the illegal black-market status of the research outside of 'severe' birth defects. Additionally, there's at least one institute meant to home and help individuals like the four seen in this episode, though whether it's a more general 'special needs' research and housing institute or one specifically for those similarly enhanced and changed isn't given. Indirectly, it suggests there may be a great deal more genetically enhanced humans out there, even outside of the potential number at the institute, as they could have found a 'good doctor' and hid it like Bashir did. Additionally, whatever is 'medically' considered severe enough to warrant genetic enhancement and what isn't doesn't seem to be something parents tend to agree with, which is similar to our own society's arguments and uncertainty surrounding similar matters of health both then and now, and most interestingly, it suggests that there may not be any way for genetically engineered humans to be neurotypical afterwards, given Bashir's

neurodivergences even as he is supposedly able to pass for 'normal' and the greatly exaggerated neurodivergences of the other four.

These four characters, introduced in the hopes that interactions with Bashir, "someone who was like them, but was living a normal life" would help them to someday "be able to live on their own and be productive" ("Statistical Probabilities" script 14), are Jack, Patrick, Lauren, and Sarina. Each seems to possess different talents and interests, as well as different 'side-effects', i.e. mental illnesses or disabilities, but all are exceedingly intelligent and apparently exceedingly unable to fit into 'normal' society. Together, however, after unexpectedly becoming hyperfocused on a Cardassian political speech about the Dominion war against the Federation, they're able not only to work out the background and recent history of the man speaking, but also discover he was being forced to give the speech in the first place. When given further access to some of the relevant information and allowed to watch a negotiation just a day later, they're able to discover the true aims of the 'peace talks' are actually to gain access to a planet the Federation thought unimportant but would actually supply enough of a substance their enemies needed to supply an almost infinite army. The four were also able to project what would happen if they didn't give up the planet, as well as a third projection suggesting how the Federation could instead form an alliance with another space-faring civilization to try to strike before their enemy could mass produce an army.

With this outpouring of "projections that would take Starfleet Intelligence months to come up with" ("Statistical Probabilities" script 34), there's a shift in Bashir's language as he begins identifying with the four and spending more time with them, saying things like "people like us" are "mutants" when asked how they managed to do all of this while talking to Commander Sisko, who the script notes

"knows exactly what [Bashir's] referring to" but "decides not to call [him] on his comment" (34). Bashir even later comments to O'Brien, "When we actually got down to working, it was incredible. We were all on the same wavelength, talking in shorthand, finishing each other's sentences—I've never had that with anyone else" (35G). The differences between Bashir and the "Jack Pack," as the writers apparently nicknamed them (ST:DS9 Companion 513), becomes a sticking point often brought up only to be quickly glossed over or steered away from, both because of the war negotiations plot and likely in attempts to be respectful to Bashir, who is the "exception" ("Statistical Probabilities" script 15A).

During the first officer's meeting after the Jack Pack arrives, it's brought up when O'Brien makes the offhand joke "I hope they don't end up being too productive—it'd make the rest of us look bad" ("Statistical Probabilities" script 15). This comment is likely made because this is the kind of banter he and Bashir share. The others chime in, however, with Worf arguing, "It's no laughing matter. If people like them are allowed to compete freely, parents would feel pressured to have their children enhanced so that they could keep up," with Odo noting, "That's precisely what prompted the ban on DNA resequencing in the first place" (15). Those comments, "Starfleet's party line" (15) as the script implies Bashir to be thinking, almost perfectly predict the Oviedo Convention in 1997, stating that "An intervention seeking to modify the human genome may only be undertaken for prevention, diagnostic, or therapeutic purposes" (Council of Europe). Later critics, such as Michael Sandel in 2007, argue the situation would be a "hormonal arms race that will leave everyone worse off" (Sandel 18). Clearly these fears have been building as genomic science and technology advanced, as have the fears on disability, neurodivergence, and other 'othering' conditions, as science's drive to understand

almost seems to make these fears fester, possibly in part to its continuing connection to eugenics, something Sandel points out with the "lingering moral qualm" and "something troubling about parents ordering up a child with certain genetic traits… even if no harm is involved" (18).

Bashir brings all this up, asking, "Why should they be excluded when their parents are the ones who broke the law?" As the script notes, this is "a difficult subject for him… [as] he tries to calmly explain how he sees it [but] despite his best efforts, Bashir can't keep the emotion from rising in his voice" ("Statistical Probabilities" script 15). O'Brien suggests, "We're not talking about excluding them, we're talking about putting certain limits on what they can do" (15), but when Bashir asks if that includes joining Starfleet, and gets an affirmative response, he can't help but ask the "logical extension of their argument"--whether that means he should be removed (15). Of course they respond that's not the case, calling him an exception to all this, and the script notes detail how "he's feeling strangely alone among his friends," a feeling that "takes him back to the days when he bore his secret alone" (16), such as the earlier episodes when he was constantly somewhat separated and treated differently due to his peculiarities while he didn't put his all into relationships. Bashir is also noted to be "troubled by the fact that what they're saying is so similar to what Jack and the others were saying" (15A). In this scene, he seems to be realizing just how deep the difference in treatment goes after speaking with people who had dealt with this inequality all their lives and were "locked away for being too smart" (3), while he instead "did [his] best not to exploit [his] abilities" (11) so as not to be caught. Through Bashir's realization and acknowledgement of this ableism, the other characters and the audience are also forced to see and address these problems in their own lives.

What this gives a glimpse of is the ingrained disproportionate treatment of those who are different, whether or not those differences are, or could be, used for 'good,' as well as the importance of community for understanding and even self-worth. Bashir may have had general peers and friends while growing up and in Starfleet, but that is likely because he spent a large portion of his formative years not even aware of what had been done, and so wasn't aware of how he would have been treated differently. Not only that, he then also spent the rest of his teenage and adulthood years holding himself back and carefully checking himself and whatever 'anomalous' traits he could in order to keep from not being treated differently in the future: he had felt alone. The Jack Pack, by contrast, hadn't been alone, and hadn't had to limit or censor their intelligence and talents, but they had been locked away and treated differently, even if not 'technically' poorly, instead.

Before the episode can lean too close towards portraying them as 'supercrips' however, it quickly swings the other way as the Jack Pack presents Bashir with another round of projections, this time suggesting there's no possible way they can win against the Dominion. They hope Bashir can find a mistake, but he agrees the math all checks out. Of course, he isn't happy with this, and even argues for surrender when presenting the projections to Sisko later to save hundreds of billions of lives in war but is of course overruled. When he tells the others that their projections were seen and dismissed, they become angry. What good is it to finally be able to help, after all, when you're not listened to, and the outcome is horrific wide scale death? The script notes that "Jack takes [the rejection] harder than the others, [and] starts to get frustrated and angry" ("Statistical Probabilities" script 41), so of course, he tries to problem solve, the very thing he's suddenly been not only allowed to do, but praised for. When they realize they could give the classified information to the enemies

currently on the station for peace talks to drastically cut down the loss of life, this seems like the logical decision. Bashir, of course, disagrees and is knocked out so they can try to put their plan into action. Sarina, however, stays behind, conflicted about the decision enough to let Bashir go and alert security and stop the security breach. Though Jack is furious later, Bashir points out that their calculations and plans hadn't accounted for Sarina's actions, and that if one person could effectively change history, maybe "things don't have to turn out like we thought" (51).

But again, before the episode can swing into portraying them as villains as its ending, two final scenes complicate a simplistic reading. O'Brien finds Bashir alone and upset, and, when Bashir states, "It's my fault, not theirs… If I hadn't been so bent on proving to the world that they had something to contribute" ("Statistical Probabilities" script 51A), his friend suggests that they actually did contribute. They had together provided very accurate projections about the peace talks and battles to come, and had also succeeded in shaking Starfleet out of its complacency and setting them on the path towards real preparation for war instead of hoping peace talks would be enough. It again suggests that one person could be the difference, no matter who that person might be. Finally, in the last scene, the Jack Pack refuses to leave without being able to say goodbye to Bashir, despite his expectation that they'd be too angry to speak with him again. Lauren suggests that, though Jack is still angry, they "wouldn't mind if our projections turned out wrong" (53). Before they can go, Jack does manage to charge forward, but instead of laying into Bashir, he almost meekly asks, "If-if we can come up with a way to beat the Dominion... will you listen?" ("Statistical Probabilities" episode 43:41). Here, with all his bravado gone, we're forced to see that not only does he still want to help and wants what's best for everyone, but he also knows Bashir only wanted what was best for them too. Not only

that, but they know others won't listen to them, even with their attempted treason hidden and their actual help publicly known. Bashir, the only 'mutant' they know with any acceptance in wider society, is still part of their community first, and still willing to fight for their inclusion. When Bashir smiles and agrees, Jack too gives a very relieved, almost hopeful smile, before snapping back into his usual self to round everyone up and get going like he didn't care (43:50).

The episode's hard questioning of ethics during wartime and the lives of statistical hundreds of billions, dovetails neatly into the ethics of disability, or the lives of specific individuals. In this way, it also deals with a past-future that is read through the present, despite any arguments as to the 'immutability' of the past that has already happened or the statistic certainty of the future to come: another topic closely followed by disability scholars with 'crip time,' which suggests "rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (Kafer 20). Bashir's narrative develops only through crip time not a linear plot, and in this way, continues Kafer's call to "wrestle with the ways in which 'the future' has been deployed in the service of compulsory able-bodiedness and able-mindedness" (27).

Looking at Julian Bashir, and *DS9* itself, allows an understanding of the era's ideas and beliefs about disability and the cure narrative so entrenched in disability studies and knowledge. *DS9* instead of just responding to the rapid advancements in genomic science and the fights for disability rights, complicates the cure narrative by suggesting the very idea of perfection isn't something that can be done or given to an individual, but is instead the mindset of what can be done with one's specific abilities. There is no 'standard' that exists, or a specific combination of traits and abilities that everyone should have; instead, it is only through the development and use of all these

individual traits and abilities that a harmonious 'perfection' can even be glimpsed. Unlike the Borg, the Federation argues for "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations" ("The Infinite Vulcan"). This complication of the typically either/or view of Star Trek as entirely liberal or conservative in its depictions of the Other and of the medical/curative understanding of disability is important precisely because of Star Trek's status as media touchstone.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Science fiction, as Kathryn Allan describes, "has always mirrored the present; it is a genre that criticizes the politics and ideologies of the current day, as its writers imagine the possibilities of future worlds" (1). She further expands, saying Science Fiction has the unique ability "to act as an early warning system: what are the possible futures, both positive and negative, that can arise out of our current potentialities?" (3). In this way, she argues for its strength as a source to study for disability studies, something the existence of this thesis, I hope, shows I agree with. *Star Trek* especially holds a place as both cultural and media juggernaut, and as a uniquely positive outlook for the future of humanity.

Though science fiction often falls into some form of cure narrative, and *Star Trek* certainly trips into this pitfall too, the fact that sometimes it *doesn't*, even if only for a few glorious moments, marks it as an incredibly important attempt to imagine a future most refuse to even see as a possibility. In fact, most assume that "disability is seen as the sign of no future, or at least of no good future… [and assume] that we all agree; not only do we accept that couples don't want a child with [a disability], we know that anyone who feels otherwise is 'crazy'" (Kafer 3). These beliefs stem from ableism and the oppression of those with disabilities, so entrenched in our history that people are able to claim it as 'natural' or 'normal' without acknowledging the true artificial and political nature behind it (3). This extends into beliefs about who can and cannot shape, control, or speak about their lives, with especially neurodivergent individuals suffering the brunt of this demi-rhetoricity (Yergeau 32), which in turn extends into direct and indirect reactions to individuals with disabilities which cause as much if not more harm to those affected than 'only' structural barriers do

("Psycho-Emotional Disablism" 124). Part of the solution then, is to dare to imagine the potential futures that seem 'crazy', and force society to acknowledge how and why it might make them uncomfortable. That's hardly an easy task, considering the ingrained traumatic beliefs and history in society itself, as well as the complexities lurking in the entire still-emerging field of disability studies, but science fiction, and *Star Trek* especially, has never really been a medium to shy away from that.

While this thesis focused on issues of neurodivergency, psycho-emotional disablism, and the cure narrative, I was only able to touch on the future possibilities of exploring crip time in *Star Trek*. Science fiction allows narrative to play especially well with the idea and questions posed by crip time, "a reorientation to time" (Kafer 27) that allows us to question long held beliefs and assumptions. When "ideas about disability and disabled minds/bodies animate many of our collective evocations of the future… [and] serve as the agreed-upon limit of our projected futures" (27), then crip time is an argument against these supposedly agreed on limits, against ideas of a person's place (or lack of a place) in the future, and against the apparent inability to imagine anything other than cures for those not perfectly able. Another critic Allan brings up and summarizes the claim that "the discourse around disability is one that simultaneously looks backward and forward" (6), lending even more weight to the importance of crip time, and of science fiction's peculiarly perfect place to see this. Hopefully, future research will explore the complexities of the intersection of science fiction, crip time, and disability.

Star Trek provides a space to reflect on the narratives we want to weave about our society and ourselves. As Chaya offers, "the stories that *Star Trek* tells are themselves complex and contradictory, both remarkably liberatory and crushingly narrow-minded" (97). Showing this complexity is important not only to understand

how it has remained so popular as a multi-media series with dominant and disenfranchised groups alike, but also to understand what our society is reflecting into that media and what that media is reflecting back out to society. Chaya offers a quote by Henry Jenkins to further illustrate this point, as they discuss the fans of *Star Trek*, explaining that it "continues to be important as a utopian space for their fantasies, still offering them a taste of 'what utopia feels like' even if it refuses to show them what (their) utopia might look like" (qtd. 99). For individuals who search and search the media for someone that looks like them, who struggles like them, but also succeeds like they hope to, there's no greater joy than to see that in a show all about the positive and hopeful future.

Despite the sometimes contradictory stories, *Star Trek* was able to provide hope with its counter narratives to disability assumptions. Characters like Data, EMH, and Bashir may not have been officially labeled with any disabilities at the time of their recording, but that didn't change the fact that characters who acted or thought differently, who were sometimes still treated differently like they might have been in real life, were now the stars of shows that were a part of a huge cultural phenomenon: they held *value*. Children could watch these shows and find comfort in the similarity of their own experiences to these beloved characters, adults could see those same children light up in wonder and even feel some of it as well for the first time, and those who had none of the same similarities at the time of watching could at least learn the value and wondrous contributions possible, if only humanity could grow to be better. As Q suggested, "the trial never ends" ("All Good Things").

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