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INTRODUCTION

Nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.—GLORIA ANZALDÚA, "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness"

Confession: I was not initially a fan of speculative fiction. There. I said it. Of course, I now know the error of my ways, the misconceptions I held about the geeky male whiteness of the genre. I now know how ill-informed I was in my belief that speculative fiction was escapist fluff that had nothing to do with my real-world investments in fighting oppression in order to find or create new, freer ways of being in the world. Then I read Octavia E. Butler and quickly realized that this genre I had dismissed, this genre I had been able to avoid throughout most of my educational career, was far more diverse, compelling, and politicized than I had ever imagined.

Reading *Parable of the Sower,* I began to understand how politically astute speculative fiction can be, how it can comment on our world and make us imagine alternative possibilities: the good, the bad, the ambivalent, and the downright terrifying. I quickly consumed everything Butler had written—every novel, every short story. I even bought an expensive copy of her out-of-print book *Survivor* after getting my first check at my first tenure-track job. Reading Butler changed the way I read as well as the way I think about

texts and the world. I never met her, but her fiction is now as familiar to me as my own memories. And now that I have spent time in her archives at the Huntington Library, she has become a long-lost friend whose complicated life, incredible drive, and exquisite prescience has often brought me to tears.

Reading Butler led me to the worlds of black speculative fiction and Afrofuturism, to feminist speculative fiction and queer speculative fiction, to new conferences, new colleagues, new friends, and ultimately to writing this book. Butler's work also led me to ask questions like: What might it mean to imagine disability differently? Differently from the stereotypical stories of pity, helplessness, and victimhood, of evil, bitterness, and abjection, of nonsexuality and isolation, of overcoming and supercrips? What would it mean to imagine disability differently than these dominant cultural narratives we typically encounter? What might it mean to imagine blackness differently? Womanhood differently? Sexuality differently? If, as Gloria Anzaldúa claims, "nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads," then changing the narratives of (dis)ability, race, and gender, changing the way marginalized people are represented and conceived in contemporary cultural productions, can also change the way such people are talked about, treated, and understood in the "real" world ("La conciencia de la mestiza" 385).

Speculative fiction allows us to imagine otherwise, to envision an alternative world or future in which what exists now has changed or disappeared and what does not exist now, like the ability to live on the moon or interact with the gods, is suddenly real. For marginalized people, this can mean imagining a future or alternative space away from oppression or in which relations between currently empowered and disempowered groups are altered or improved. Speculative fiction can also be a space to imagine the worst, to think about what could be if current inequalities and injustices are allowed to continue. Marie Jakober writes that "the great gift of speculative fiction [is that] it makes us think, and specifically, it makes us think *differently*. It makes us examine things we have never examined. Even better, it makes us *re-imagine* things we thought we knew" (30; original emphasis). The black women writers in this book have made me think differently, examine texts differently, and imagine and reimagine (dis)ability, race, and gender in ways I never had before. In honor of Butler and the many writers her work eventually lead me to, I begin this book with the often-stated (and hashtagged) assertion that representation matters in material, concrete, and life-affirming—life-changing—ways. Representation matters.

CONTEMPORARY BLACK WOMEN'S speculative fiction reimagines the possibilities and meanings of bodyminds, particularly in regard to (dis)ability, race, and gender.[1] This reimagining changes the rules of interpretation, requiring modes of analysis that take into account both the relationships between (dis)ability, race, and gender and the contexts in which these categories exist. Contemporary black women's speculative fiction changes the rules of reality to create worlds with new or different genders, races, disabilities, and other forms of life, and in doing so these texts also require a change in how we read and interpret these categories.

Bodyminds Reimagined is the first monograph to focus on the representation of (dis)ability by black authors. At the heart of it all, this book is a loving, critical intervention into black feminist theory and disability studies. Black feminist theory is an approach to interpreting, acknowledging, and tracing the effects of interlocking oppressions, particularly from the perspective of black women. Black feminist theory is an academic field and mode of literary criticism that emerged out of black feminist movements and groups who found their presence, experiences, and concerns being excluded or ignored within white mainstream feminism and black power and civil rights movements. Disability studies is the interdisciplinary investigation of (dis)ability as a socially constructed phenomenon and systemic social discourse which determines how bodyminds and behaviors are labeled, valued, represented, and treated. While the field began as primarily a social-science-based one in the 1980s, disability studies has now become a field infused with the humanities. Due to its later emergence as a field, disability studies has benefited immensely from theories and approaches in women's and gender studies and race and ethnicity studies. While both black feminist theory and disability studies are academic projects with firm social justice roots and investments, the scholarship in each of these fields rarely becomes scholarship in the other.

While black feminist theorists have done much to demonstrate the relationship of various oppressions, (dis)ability is rarely accounted for in black feminist theory. Of course, even though (dis)ability is often not acknowledged as a vector of power in black feminist theory, it is absolutely not the case that black feminists have done no work on issues of disability.[2] In fact, issues of disability have appeared in numerous moments in black feminist theory and activism over time; black feminist scholars have just not generally undertaken this work from an explicitly disability studies perspective or directly connected their work to the disability rights movement. Concomi-

tantly, disability studies scholars have generally not recognized black feminist work on health activism, illness, and access to medical care as properly disability studies.[3]

The field of disability studies, while often attentive to gender and sexuality, has often avoided issues of race, remaining centered on white experiences and representations of disability. That said, the area of race and disability studies has seen dramatic increase and exciting development in recent years.[4] I build on the work of scholars such as Ellen Samuels and Julie Avril Minich who have demonstrated how incorporating a disability studies perspective is key to understanding the racial and gendered implications of a text and how attention to race and gender similarly helps reveal the operation of ideologies of ability in texts seemingly not "about" disability at all. In this book, therefore, analysis of the role of (dis)ability in speculative fiction by black women illuminates issues of race and gender that might otherwise be obscured.

Both black feminist theory and disability studies have provided insights that have fueled my personal and intellectual development in innumerable ways. *Bodyminds Reimagined* is my effort to bring them together, demonstrating both their overlapping interests and the ways in which each field has theories and insights that are valuable to the other. This book is a call to black feminists to include (dis)ability in our work and investigate both ableism (discrimination toward people with disabilities) and ability privilege (the personal, social, and structural advantages given to the nondisabled in our society) in our intellectual and activist communities. It is an exhortation to disability studies scholars to not merely include race, but to allow black feminist and critical race theories to transform the field. More specifically, *Bodyminds Reimagined* intervenes in disability studies literary criticism, which has often been based on more canonical, realist, and/or white-authored texts. By offering alternative theories for interpreting (dis)ability in literature in conjunction with race and gender, particularly in the context of nonrealist texts, I intend to change the way we read and analyze literature in disability studies. This occurs even at the level of language.

Language Choices: Bodymind and (Dis)ability

There are two key terms I use throughout this book that may be unfamiliar to readers: *bodymind* and *(dis)ability*. While both terms have some established history within disability studies, they are not necessarily used widely in the field. Bodymind and (dis)ability, however, are essential terms for my work on black women's speculative fiction. In her foundational article "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian argues that the language of black feminist theorists and literary critics ought to be based on and inspired by the language of the texts under study. In this case, the black women's speculative fictional texts I analyze in this book particularly demand terminology that can account for the nonrealist representations of new or altered people, societies, and worlds. A major argument of *Bodyminds Reimagined* is that interpreting the reimagining performed by black women's speculative fiction requires modes of analysis that take into account both the relationships between social systems of privilege and oppression as well as the context in which categories of (dis)ability, race, and gender exist and are given meaning. One of these modes of analysis is finding language that can effectively express the theoretical insights of these texts.

As indicated by the title, the first essential term for this book is *bodymind*. Bodymind is a materialist feminist disability studies concept from Margaret Price that refers to the enmeshment of the mind and body, which are typically understood as interacting and connected, yet distinct entities due to the Cartesian dualism of Western philosophy ("The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain" 270). The term *bodymind* insists on the inextricability of mind and body and highlights how processes within our being impact one another in such a way that the notion of a physical versus mental process is difficult, if not impossible to clearly discern in most cases (269). Price argues that bodymind cannot be simply a rhetorical stand-in for the phrase "mind and body"; rather, it must do theoretical work as a disability studies term. *Bodymind* is an essential concept in chapter 3 in my discussion of hyperempathy, a nonrealist disability that is both mental and physical in origin and manifestation. *Bodymind* generally, however, is an important and theoretically useful term to use in analyzing speculative fiction as the nonrealist possibilities of human and nonhuman subjects, such as the werewolves discussed in chapter 4, often highlight the imbrication of mind and body, sometimes in extreme or explicitly apparent ways that do not exist in our reality.

In addition to the utility of the term *bodymind* in discussions of speculative fiction, I also use this term because of its theoretical utility in discussions of race and (dis)ability. For example, *bodymind* is particularly useful in discussing the toll racism takes on people of color. As more research reveals the ways experiences and histories of oppression impact us mentally,

physically, and even on a cellular level, the term *bodymind* can help highlight the relationship of nonphysical experiences of oppression—psychic stress—and overall well-being.[5] While this research is emergent, people of color and women have long challenged their association with pure embodiment and the degradation of the body as unable to produce knowledge through a rejection of the mind/body divide. *Bodymind* provides, therefore, a politically and theoretically useful term in discussing (dis)ability in black women's speculative fiction and more.

The second key term for this book is *(dis)ability*. I use this term to reference the overarching social system of bodily and mental norms that includes ability and disability. I use (dis)ability because unlike terms such as *gender*, which references man, woman, genderqueer, transgender, and other gender identities, disability without the parenthetical adjustment merely references disability and impairment. The term *(dis)ability* also highlights the mutual dependency of disability and ability to define one another. While other scholars use *dis/ability* or *ability/disability* to similar effect, I believe the parenthetical curve as opposed to the backslash better visually suggests the shifting, contentious, and contextual boundaries between disability and ability.[6]

Throughout this book, I use *(dis)ability* when referencing the wider social system and I use *disability* or *ability* when referring to those specific parts of the (dis)ability system. While I recognize that there may be moments in which the line between disability and (dis)ability may be blurry, it's important to linguistically differentiate as best as possible in this work for a number of reasons. First, (dis)ability allows me to better highlight the important relationship of hyperability or "powers" and disability in speculative fiction. Second, in speculative fiction the function and meaning of (dis)ability does not necessarily comply with our realist understanding of what constitutes ability and disability and therefore must be explained for each text. Third, as my approach to interpretation is highly informed by theories of intersectionality, there is real critical utility in having a linguistic corollary when talking about (dis)ability and other vectors of power like race and gender. This change in terminology, therefore, is both important for capturing the nuances of the nonrealist worlds in speculative fiction and necessary for having shared, parallel language in bringing together black feminist theory and disability studies. Both of my key terms, *(dis)ability* and *bodymind*, are used and developed in relationship to the theoretical frameworks I engage in this book as well.

Theoretical Foundations: Intersectionality and Crip Theory

Throughout *Bodyminds Reimagined*, I use a genre-attentive and text-specific approach to (dis)ability, race, and gender that is informed by both black feminist theory and disability studies. This approach is first informed by Barbara Christian's insistence that theory does not have to look a particular way or use a prescribed language to produce knowledge, but can take narrative forms in literature (Christian, "Race for Theory" 41). Christian writes that black feminist literary critics do not have to find or create theories to apply to literature, but instead should try to understand the theories being expressed or embodied in the texts themselves through close reading because "every text suggests a new approach" (50). I've already discussed how this approach influences my use of the terms *bodymind* and *(dis)ability*, but it also shapes how I engage with current theories in black feminist theory and disability studies. Since there is still only a small body of scholarship on (dis)ability in black women's literature, it is particularly necessary that I take the literary texts in this study as productions of theories which will aid in understanding their representations of (dis)ability, race, and gender. Black women writers' reimagining of the possiblities and meanings of bodyminds is a form of theorizing about social categories, identities, and oppressions which operates in conversation with existing theories rather than replicating theory wholesale or being pure expression that must be theorized by the critic. There are two key theoretical conversations that inform my interpretations of the insights of black women's speculative fiction: intersectionality and crip theory.

Intersectionality is a term generally used to describe both how people experience multiple social systems at once and a scholarly approach to analyzing and researching this multiplicity of identities, oppressions, and privileges. Although the specific word comes from Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept has its roots in black and woman-of-color feminisms that address the ways women of color deal with both racism and sexism in their daily lives—even within feminist and antiracist organizations that sometimes ignore, downplay, or even perpetuate one oppression in the effort to fight another.[7] Typically, *intersectionality* is used to reference major social identities that are created within systems of privilege and oppression, including race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, nationality, and ethnicity. However, the term can also be used more liberally to include any intersecting identity, even those that are not typically viewed as major social markers but may be especially salient in particular contexts, such as religion.

In my use of *intersectionality* in this book, I read (dis)ability, race, gender, and sexuality as simultaneously identities, experiences, systems of privilege and oppression, discourses, and historically situated social constructions with material effects. I understand intersectionality as an epistemological orientation and practice that is invested in coalition building and resistance to dominant structures of power.[8] I trace the relationships between systems of power in the United States, historically and contemporarily, and explore how black women writers of speculative fiction change the rules of reality in their texts to contest oppressive systems of thought and behavior.

My intersectional approach takes into account recent critiques of the term without abandoning the concept altogether.[9] I acknowledge that the term *intersectionality* is too often used only in the context of multiply marginalized people, especially black women. Intersectionality is also too often assumed to only apply to minority identity positions or understood in purely additive and ever-expanding terms. But what is important about these statements is that they are about problems with how intersectionality is being used and not necessarily issues with intersectionality itself as a theoretical approach. This is where I differ from scholars who are encouraging a move toward other terms and methods. I am personally still invested in the potential of intersectionality and I find power in its particular women-of-color lineage even as I am aware and critical of how it has been used in limiting, static, and even regressive ways. Intersectionality does not mean the same thing to all scholars nor is it used in a uniform way. As a dynamic form of matrix (as opposed to single-axis) thinking, intersectionality provides an important means for untangling the mutual constitution of oppressions such as racism, ableism, and sexism and for understanding how systems of power work within and beyond identity claims alone. My approach to intersectionality, therefore, responds to critiques of it while also incorporating work by scholars such as Cathy J. Cohen, who calls for a destabilization and radical politicization of identities rather than their destruction because identities can be used for survival and collective action (36–37, 45; see also Moya). In particular, the incorporation of (dis)ability into intersectional frameworks where it is often left out helps highlight the necessity of including identity, but not being limited to identity alone in intersectional analyses because of the way discourses of (dis)ability have been used to justify discrimination and violence against other marginalized groups (Baynton).

My use of intersectionality is directly informed by the way I read the relationship of identities and oppressions interacting within black women's speculative fiction. The texts I discuss in this book are ideologically complex. The genre of speculative fiction particularly lends itself to such complexity because its nonrealist conventions can be used to highlight the socially constructed, and therefore mutable, nature of concepts like (dis)ability, race, and gender. By reimagining the meanings and possibilities of bodyminds, speculative fiction can alter the meanings of these categories, requiring readers and critics alike to adapt our modes of reading, interpretation, and analysis or develop new ones. The black women authors in this study take up the possibilities of speculative fiction in order to depict ableism, racism, and sexism as intersecting, mutually constitutive forces which often collude with one another as well as act in place of one another.[10] Through nonrealist conventions such as time travel, futuristic settings, and nonhuman characters, these authors make evident the often-occluded ways that racism and sexism can be enacted through discourses of (dis)ability and how ableism can take effect through concepts of race and gender in the real world. These texts depict how discursive and material enactments of ableism, racism, and sexism are interactively deployed in social, political, and interpersonal arenas. At the same time, these texts refuse to reduce such moments of codeployment to a single oppression or to suggest that these moments only impact those who are multiply marginalized. The black women's speculative fiction in this book relishes in intersectional complexity, possibility, and change.

The second theoretical foundation of this book is crip theory, a relatively recent theoretical turn in disability studies.[11] Although mentioned by scholars like Carrie Sandahl early in the development of the field, the term *crip theory* was popularized by Robert McRuer in his book by the same name, establishing it as an approach to disability studies, similar to queer theory, which seeks to destabilize and contest, but not entirely dismantle, disability identity (Sandahl, "Queering the Crip or Cripping the Queer?" 53). More recently, Alison Kafer argues that crip theory expands and enriches disability studies by "including within disability communities those who lack a 'proper' (read: medically acceptable, doctor-provided, and insurer-approved) diagnosis for their symptoms" and by "departing from the social model's assumption that 'disabled' and 'nondisabled' are discrete, self-evident categories, choosing instead to explore the creation of such categories and the moments in which they fail to hold" (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 36, 18). The potential failure and flexibility of the label *disability* is critical to reading speculative

fictional texts that do not represent (dis)ability in traditional or expected ways. This crip theory understanding of disability as a category also dovetails with my approach to intersectionality, which emphasizes understanding (dis)ability, race, and gender as socially constructed and mutable social systems of oppression, identity, discourse, and experience.

Crip theory is especially important when discussing the work of racially marginalized writers because the social system of (dis)ability has a different impact on and meaning for such populations due to race. A crip theory approach to race and disability studies requires an expansion of the category of disability to include illness, disease, and secondary health effects.[12] This is because people of color and the poor are more likely to have experiences on the borders or outside of able-bodiedness and able-mindedness due to violence and failures of society to provide access to affordable, quality insurance, housing, and medical care.[13] I believe crip theory is fundamental to the incorporation of race into disability studies and to the incorporation of disability studies into race and ethnicity studies as well.

The history of race in disability studies is a vexed one that I should acknowledge, particularly because early work in race and disability studies has several direct relationships to my focus on black women's speculative fiction. The name that typically appears first in discussions of race and disability is Chris Bell and his infamous, ubiquitously cited essay "Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal." This essay is often referenced as proof of the whiteness of disability studies. However, while Bell's critique is valid—disability studies was and is very white and often insular—his essay is too often taken to mean that there was zero work on race and disability prior to this modest proposal for change. This assumption is false.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson was one of the first disability studies scholars to provide sustained race and disability analysis in the final chapter of her book *Extraordinary Bodies*, published in 1997. Analyzing work by Ann Petry, Toni Morrison, and Audre Lorde, Garland-Thomson contends that these writers infuse "the traditionally mute, static spectacle of otherness with voice, gaze, and power to act—all without normalizing the extraordinary body" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 133). This refusal to normalize is what differentiates these texts from the others Garland-Thomson analyzes and is the reason why she concludes her book with them. It is important to both the field and my work that one of the earliest studies of disability and literature ends with writing by black women as the space that offers the most celebratory, complex, and politicized possibilities for representing disability.

Even before Garland-Thomson's book, however, other scholars also acknowledged the need for developing work on the impact of race on experiences of disability,[14] and a few key disability studies articles and books appeared in the 1990s and early 2000s which discussed disability and race.[15] Furthermore, many of the texts to initially engage the intersection of disability and race did so through analysis of the American freak show and its position at the center of multiple oppressive discourses. The role of the freak show in early work on race and disability is important for this book because the decline of the American freak show in the 1940s coincides with the emerging popularity of speculative fiction and the so-called Golden Age of Science Fiction. Recognizing this concurrent rise and decline as connected, Jeffery A. Weinstock argues that "with the freak show's waning hold on American culture, along with society's moral reevaluation of exhibiting real-world non-Western or disabled people for amusement, a psychic *need* for freaks found expression in SF fiction and film" (328; original emphasis). The suggested cultural replacement of freak shows with science fiction geneologically and theoretically connects early work on race and disability to my work here on (dis)ability, race, and gender in contemporary black women's speculative fiction.

While this brief genealogy of race in disability studies could be interpreted as a too-generous reading of the early racial politics of the field, I think it's important to acknowledge rather than dismiss or ignore this scholarship, even if it does not fit perfectly within current expectations of what research on race and (dis)ability "should" look like. To erase this history is to deny disability studies' vexed history of engagement with race, which provides the foundation for recent work to be more intersectional and nuanced, particularly recent work in crip theory that challenges the way we understand disability and disability politics specifically through engagement with race.

Drawing on the theoretical resources outlined here, this book models methods of readings and interpretation which allow me—and hopefully other readers and critics—to understand each text's own ways of theorizing and reimagining bodyminds. In turn, I consider how these texts require us to change our modes of reading, interpreting, and analyzing (dis)ability, race, and gender. Black women authors' reimagined bodyminds are made particularly possible by the nonrealist conventions of speculative fiction. To further demonstrate this approach, I'd like to turn briefly to a recent example from popular culture. Although neither fiction nor written by a black

woman, the speculative thriller film *The Girl with All the Gifts,* released in the United Kingdom in 2016 and in the United States in 2017, provides a useful demonstration of the importance of terms like *bodymind* and *(dis)ability* as well as the need for intersectionality and crip theory in the analysis of (dis)ability, race, and gender in nonrealist representations. Set in a near future England, *The Girl with All the Gifts* is a modern take on the zombie apocalypse genre. The film opens by introducing the audience to Melanie, a young black girl who is confined in an institution for reasons initially unknown.

Melanie wears an orange hooded sweatshirt and sweatpants reminiscent of a prison jumpsuit and sleeps in a bare, locked cell with only a cot; a wheelchair; and two personal photos, which she keeps hidden. When Melanie is taken out of her cell, two guards appear, one who keeps a gun pointed at her at all times and another who straps her into the wheelchair across her legs, hands, and head. Melanie's cheerful, kind greetings to each adult she encounters stands in stark contrast to the fear and hatred directed at her and the other children in the institution. Twice an offscreen guard calls them "friggin' abortions" and later another refers to them as "creepy," questioning how the teacher, Ms. Justineau, can stand to be so close to them. The children in the institution, seemingly all white boys besides Melanie, wear the same attire and are strapped into wheelchairs in the same fashion.[16] They are all taken and left strapped in their wheelchairs in a classroom. Ms. Justineau is the only person who seems to regard the children with any compassion, and she is particularly fond of Melanie.

At one point, after Melanie shares a story she wrote, Ms. Justineau reaches out and gently caresses the top of Melanie's head. Melanie's closed eyes and deep breath in response suggests that she is rarely, if ever, touched. In this moment, however, the head guard, Sergeant Parks, bursts in to yell at Ms. Justineau for breaking the rules by touching Melanie. He cautions her that they are not truly children at all. To demonstrate his point Sergeant Parks lifts his sleeve, spits on his arm, and rubs.[17] He then places his arm in front of a boy in the class, who begins to respond in an animal-like fashion, growling and straining to bite Parks's arm. Quickly the other children on that side of the room respond in the same way. This is the audience's first indication of what is going on in the world of the film.

After this scene the film slowly reveals increasing details about the situation outside of the institution. We learn that much of humanity has been wiped out by a parasitic fungal disease that takes over the brain, creating "hungries" who roam abandoned cities and attack living creatures, human and animal alike. Hungries have gray, decaying skin, are mostly dormant, and seemingly lack self-awareness. They stand still in large groups for extended periods of time until they are awakened, so to speak, primarily due to the smell of noninfected beings nearby, as well as when there is sudden movement or loud sound. When awakened, hungries are both fast and strong and spread their disease through bodily contact.

The institution where Melanie and the children are kept is at once a military base to protect uninfected humans and a research facility. The children there, we eventually learn, are being monitored and studied in order to understand the fungal disease. This includes killing some of the children to dissect their bodies in the hopes of using their brains and spinal fluids to create a cure. Unlike the hungries, who roam mindlessly, these children were born with the disease and their brains have a more symbiotic relationship with the fungus. So while they are carriers and need to eat raw meat of some sort (in the institution we see Melanie fed a bowl of worms, later she eats a cat and a bird), children born with the disease are otherwise able to speak, learn, move, and behave like other humans.

Not long into the film the institution is attacked by hungries. Melanie escapes with Ms. Justineau, Dr. Caldwell, Sergeant Parks, and a guard named Kieran. While Parks and Kieran wish to leave Melanie behind, Ms. Justineau and Dr. Caldwell insist on taking her with them—the former because she truly cares about Melanie and the latter because she needs Melanie's body to create a cure. The rest of the film involves this group travelling through the dystopian wasteland. As they travel, Melanie learns more about her disease, its effects, and how to survive.

Bodymind is a useful term in analyzing *The Girl with All the Gifts.* Melanie's brain—what we would consider the home of the mind—is covered with this fungus which causes her to crave flesh and, when hungry, temporarily lose self-awareness and self-control. While her body remains externally unchanged, she appears to be faster and stronger than a typical child. It is impossible to refer to her disease as merely physical or mental alone when hunger, typically considered a very physiological process, results in dramatic mental effects for her. Melanie's bodymind is holistically affected by the fungus.

Similarly, *(dis)ability* as an overarching term for disability and ability and the contestable borders in between is also appropriate for discussions of the film, particularly from a crip theory perspective, which includes illness, disease, and discourses of (dis)ability in its approach. If not for the insti-

tutional setting and the way the adults in the film treat her, Melanie would mostly appear nondisabled and in some ways even hyper-able. She is smart, observant, and physically strong and agile. As the film progresses she better understands that when she becomes hungry she needs to eat raw meat quickly to avoid harming people around her. Melanie is essentially the heroine of the film. To the majority of the adults around her, however, she is too different and too threatening; she must be confined, studied, treated, and cured—or used as a cure for others. People around Melanie question her very humanity and her status as "alive," conjecturing that she may be merely mimicking human behaviors instead of being a true human. For example, the head researcher, Dr. Caldwell, tells Ms. Justineau that "they present as children" but "the fungus does their thinking for them." In the world of the film Melanie is treated as disabled and dangerously so because she poses the threat of both death (if she were to eat someone) and contagion (if she were to bite or touch them). The fear of contagion here is very much about disability, as the disease is incredibly disabling to adults. The tension between Melanie's fresh-faced innocence and her danger to the adults is palpable throughout the film.

The unclear and shifting (dis)ability status of children with the disease, however, becomes particularly evident when Melanie discovers a group of them who roam as a feral pack to attack people and animals. While the children are dirty and lack language since they had no education as Melanie did, they appear to be able to communicate with and take care of one another. What constitutes disability in this context? It becomes increasingly evident that the world is changing and Melanie and children like her are much more likely to survive. The world the adults once knew—our realist world—is all but gone. As the world changes, what is and is not a disability changes as well, revealing an essential part of reading (dis)ability, race, and gender in speculative fiction: the importance of context and interpreting a text within its rules of reality—something I will say more about in the reading methods section of this introduction.

But *The Girl with All the Gifts* is not exclusively about disability. We cannot understand the nuances and registers of this nonrealist representation if we do not read intersectionally. The immense militarized fear of these children and their disease is racialized via the choice to make Melanie our protagonist.[18] She is the only child of color depicted and one of three people of color in the film with speaking lines. She is a black girl surrounded by white people as she is imprisoned for medical research in a military compound and then treated as a prisoner as she travels with the others. While her race is never directly commented on, her disease and the fear it invokes in others comes across as a metaphor for racialized fear. Shortly after their escape, Parks insists that Melanie be handcuffed, muzzled, and strapped to the gun turret on the roof of their military vehicle rather than ride inside. Ms. Justineau exclaims, "She's got a muzzle on her face and her hands tied behind her back and you're still afraid of her?" Park replies, "Yeah, and you should be too." Although this film is set and was produced in the United Kingdom, its allusion here to antiblack police/military violence—which is far from exclusive to the United States—is striking. Numerous incidents of police violence have been justified through claims of police officers fearing for their own lives, even when the person who was injured or murdered was handcuffed, restrained, outnumbered, and/or significantly smaller than the police officer(s) involved.

We cannot separate fear of Melanie's disease from fear of her blackness. The frequent expressions of her being not truly human gesture toward a long history of dehumanizing black people around the world, to say nothing of the history of medical experimentation on black bodies. Yet our compassion for her, I argue, is also in response to her age and gender. As a prepubescent child Melanie is presumed innocent by viewers.[19] She is also soft-spoken, polite, and a girl, whereas the other children in the institution are boys, and the feral children are all long-haired and dirty in a way that occludes their sex/gender identities. The gentle innocence the audience is encouraged to perceive in Melanie via casting and acting choices would be more difficult if she were played by a young black boy. Many black children are read as older than they are;[20] but in the context of the institutional setting, the handcuffs, and so on, Melanie's gender softens the explicitness of the film's commentary on antiblack police violence since much of that discourse is focused on the targeting of black men and boys.[21] Melanie's age and gender therefore work to counterbalance the threatening nature of her race and (dis)ability in the world of the film.

As the film moves toward its end Dr. Caldwell makes a desperate attempt at creating a cure by playing on Melanie's emotions, telling her that if she agrees to the dissection she can save Ms. Justineau's life. Melanie seems ready to agree, but first asks what will happen to the other children. When Dr. Caldwell doesn't respond Melanie asks if she still thinks that children with the disease merely mimic human behavior. Dr. Caldwell says no and they have the following exchange:

MELANIE. We're alive?

DR. CALDWELL. Yes, you're alive.

MELANIE. Then why should it be us that dies for you?

In this moment Melanie refuses to sacrifice herself and the other children. This explicitly flips a frequent trope in horror, thriller, and action films in which characters of color regularly act as martyrs, dying valiantly to save the white protagonists. The scene also rejects the trope of disabled people dying or being cured at the end of a film or novel. Instead of sacrificing herself to save Ms. Justineau, the only person who has ever shown her love, Melanie leaves the trailer they are hiding out in and goes to set a large plant of the fungus on fire, which will release the infectious spores, creating a massive if not worldwide epidemic. By releasing the spores Melanie initiates a new world in which she will no longer be considered disabled, dangerous, or abnormal due to her disease. This choice allows for an undetermined future for Melanie and the children like her, yet it also means sacrificing the lives and freedom of the adults with her. Dr. Caldwell and Sergeant Parks both die chasing after Melanie, and Ms. Justineau must live permanently in the air-locked trailer or she will become infected. Melanie's decision to release the spores is represented as an emotional one for her, but one she makes with clear determination.

The final scene begins with a close-up of Ms. Justineau's face as she lies in bed crying. There is a knock and she gets up. Outside the trailer Melanie organizes the children from the institution and from the feral group they encountered earlier in the film. The children sit in rows on the ground outside facing a large windowed area so that Ms. Justineau can teach them via a loud speaker from inside. When Ms. Justineau tells the children that she will tell them a story if there is time, Melanie speaks the final words of the film. With the sun and a smile on her face, she responds, "There'll be lots of time." The film ends here with a young black girl who was considered dangerous and disabled by the adults around her now beginning a new world for herself and people like her in which their bodymind differences will not be considered disabling, dangerous, or animalistic. At the end of the film, it appears Ms. Justineau will have to spend the rest of her life in that trailer, and it is unclear how and if this group of children will create a lasting society for themselves. The film thematically draws on discourses of disability as well as, more subtly, discourses of race and gender to create empathy for both Melanie and Ms. Justineau in this simultaneously dark and hopeful ending.

The Girl with All the Gifts is a useful popular culture example which demonstrates the utility of my key terms, *bodymind* and *(dis)ability*, and my primary theoretical frameworks, intersectionality and crip theory, in interpreting (dis)ability, race, and gender in nonrealist representations. Throughout the rest of *Bodyminds Reimagined* I explore how black women writers of speculative fiction reimagine the possibilities of bodyminds and thereby change not only the rules of reality in these nonrealist worlds, but also the rules of interpretation, requiring modes of analysis that consider both the relationships of (dis)ability, race, and gender and the contexts in which these terms are given meaning. While the intersectional relationship of (dis)ability, race, gender, and other vectors of power are important to explore in representations of all kinds, speculative fiction provides a particularly interesting and important avenue for interrogating the social construction and mutual constitution of these systems of privilege and oppression.

Why Speculative Fiction?

In this book I use the term *speculative fiction* to reference any creative writing in which the rules of reality do not fully apply, including magical realism, utopian and dystopian literature, fantasy, science fiction, voodoo, ghost stories, and hybrid genres. By "rules of reality," I mean culturally and historically specific social narratives of the possibilities and meanings of bodyminds, time, space, and technology, as well as our constructed notions of what constitutes a "real" disability, gender, race, and so on. For example, in terms of technology, air travel would have defied the rules of reality for people in the Middle Ages and yet it is an accepted possibility today even for those who have never experienced this type of travel themselves. To take a (dis)ability specific example, the learning disability Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a contemporary diagnosis that did not exist as a "real" disability before being defined by psychological professionals and accepted by society at large. On the other hand, homosexuality was once considered a psychological disorder by the American Psychological Association, but is no longer categorized as such.[22] Drawing from several examples from *The Girl with All the Gifts* that have been previously noted in this introduction, reading within the rules of the reality of the film means understanding the fungal infection as a real disease with potentially disabling effects in the narrative. While crip theory problematizes diagnosis as the sole parameter for defining disability, these examples serve to illustrate

what I mean by historically and culturally specific rules of reality. Since speculative fiction includes stories in the future, other worlds, altered pasts, and altered present periods, this genre can shift, challenge, and play on what readers expect of bodyminds and reveal how such expectations shape definitions of (dis)ability, race, and gender. *Bodyminds Reimagined* analyzes how representations of (dis)ability, race, and gender in speculative fiction force readers to question the ideologies undergirding these categories. I contend that questioning the ideologies of (dis)ability, race, and gender in black women's speculative fiction allows for a challenge to the attitudes, biases, and behaviors that result from them, as well as an exploration of their relationships to one another.

I use *speculative fiction* as my umbrella term because the novels in this study do not collectively fit under any other single genre label, nor do they all comfortably fit within other critical terms. For example, Mark Dery's *Afrofuturism* is primarily concerned with racialized uses of technology and the future, while Marleen S. Barr's *feminist fabulation* focuses on expressions of postmodern feminist critique (Dery 8; Barr *Lost in Space* 11–12). Likewise, Ingrid Thaler's term *Black Atlantic speculative fictions* is primarily concerned with race and nonnormative notions of time, while *utopian literature* refers to ideal or (nearly) perfect imagined societies and *dystopian literature* references its opposite: undesirable, nightmare fictional worlds (2).[23] While issues of technology, feminism, time, and better and worse imagined futures will all be a part of the chapters to come, none of these are my exclusive focus. My work here engages major issues in Afrofuturism, feminist fabulation, Black Atlantic speculative fiction, utopias, and dystopias—and hopefully has important insights for scholars of these areas—but the texts analyzed in this book are not encompassed by any one of these terms alone. The focus of *Bodyminds Reimagined* is on representations of (dis)ability, race, and gender in nonrealist texts by black women. Speculative fiction is therefore the most appropriate broad, umbrella term for this work, one that allows me to include a wide variety of texts which may not otherwise be read together. Further, my use of speculative fiction allows me to mostly circumvent discussions of genre boundaries, genre histories (including histories of exclusion), and canon building which are not essential to my arguments.[24] On the whole, I am less concerned about genre labels and more concerned with how a variety of nonrealist tropes and devices influence the representation of (dis)ability, race, and gender in these black women's texts.

Black women's speculative fiction has social and political importance because of how the texts shift our understanding of the meanings of and relationships between (dis)ability, race, and gender. Despite its potential, speculative fiction is generally an undertheorized genre. Jewelle Gomez discusses the reason for this undertheorization, writing that speculative fiction "is thought of as 'fun' rather than as serious writing worthy of critical discussion. . . . [It is this] idea that speculative fiction is somehow an indulgence or that it is trivial that seems the more probable reason for its dismissal by literary critics" (950). Both disability studies and black feminist theory have historically focused more on realist texts for a number of practical and political reasons that ought to be understood.

In disability studies there is an emphasis on the need for less ableist representations of people with disabilities that has produced a strong investment in life writing and realism.[25] G. Thomas Couser writes that disability life writing is a response to traditional misrepresentation in Western culture which can allow people with disabilities to move from object to subject and consciously counter ableist stereotypes and ignorance.[26] Although Couser does not claim that the realism of life writing is the only method through which such changes in social perception can occur, his work is reflective of the field's leanings toward realism as an effective way to create cultural change.[27] Life writing emphasizes notions of the real and the authentic in opposition to a history of negative and skewed portrayals of people with disabilities by nondisabled people. Along these lines, Sara Hosey writes that "many [disability studies] critiques implicitly (and at times, explicitly) call for a more realistic, more sophisticated, and perhaps more ethical disability representation" (37). Here Hosey's connection between realism, sophistication, and ethics implies that these elements go hand in hand.[28] I, however, question whether the relationship of realism with authenticity, ethics, and sophistication is as inherent or clear cut as some work in disability studies might suggest.

Black women writers also have a history of critical engagement with the real-world repercussions of fictional representations. As Ann DuCille notes, early black women's literature was primarily concerned with combating negative stereotypes of black women by representing black women characters who were infallibly good and who could fit within the cult of true womanhood via the politics of respectability (13–30).[29] Early black feminist literary criticism often focused on recovering these writers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in an attempt to bring their work out of the shadows of history and create a genealogy of black women's writing.[30] The

realist emphasis and political practicality of much early black women's fiction, however, had its limits, particularly from a disability studies perspective. As Ellen Samuels writes, throughout early African American literature generally there is "an emphasis on wholeness, uprightness, good health and independence" (*Fantasies of Identification* 30). These concepts, which appeared regularly in early black women's writing, make drawing attention to disability quite difficult because the disabled bodymind is typically considered in opposition to these terms—though more disability studies scholars are finding outliers and challengers to this general trend.[31]

The expectations of what literature can or should do for black people shifted as time passed, and there was an increase in complexity of representations which began to include issues of sexuality and violence, particularly intracommunity violence. Although the Harlem Renaissance witnessed early black speculative fiction by men, such as W. E. B. Du Bois's "The Comet," published in 1920, and George Schuyler's *Black No More*, published in 1931, the majority of African American texts still worked within the confines of realism. Like disability rights communities, many black people believed and still believe that the primary purpose of black-authored literature was/is to combat racism by offering positive, realistic representations that do not perpetuate stereotypes or create negative associations with black people.[32] Butler experienced such expectations for her work, stating, "When I began writing back in the 60s, my writing of anything but utter reality was considered some kind of, almost betrayal, a waste of time at best. I was supposed to, according to some people, be contributing to the struggle and not writing things that weren't real" (quoted in Hampton 137). As the Black Women Writers Renaissance emerged in the 1970s, however, this emphasis on realism began to shift.

The focus on realism as the proper or preferred avenue for politically effective literature for marginalized groups like black women and disabled people overlooks the immense possibilties of speculative fiction as well as the limits of realism. Several black feminist scholars have critiqued this faith in realistic representations. Madhu Dubey, for example, contends that models of characterization that imply there is a real, knowable black subject or community to properly represent prevent appreciation for nonrealist characterizations that attempt to destabilize a humanist model of identity and reality (*Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* 4). Wahneema Lubiano also argues against prioritizing realism, writing, "Deployed as a narrative form dependent upon recognition of reality, realism suggests disclosure of the truth (and then closure of the representation); realism invites readers/audience to accept what is offered as a slice of life because the narrative contains elements of 'fact'. . . . Realism used uncritically as a mode for African-American art implies that our lives can be captured by the presentation of enough documentary evidence or by insistence on another truth" (262–63).

Black women novelists have been central in the "effort to interrupt the realist legacy" of African American literature (Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* 5). Authors such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker were some of the earliest contemporary black women authors to present challenges to this legacy with their uses of magical realism, ghost stories, dream sequences, and other nonrealist literary devices, while still operating within a relatively realist framework. Much has been written about these authors, both within and outside of black feminist literary criticism, but substantially less has been written about black women speculative fiction writers, especially in regard to their representation of (dis)ability.

I fully acknowledge the importance and impact of disability life writing and other realist modes of representing disability that have been the focus of much disability studies literary criticism. However, the arguments of Dubey and Lubiano about the limits of realist representations for black subjects also apply to disabled subjects. Emily Baldys argues, "We must be critical not only of depictions that seem obviously overdetermined and fantastical, but also of those that seem realistic or believable . . . by challenging representations that offer ideologically limited versions of the 'reality' of disability" (139).[33] By focusing on ideology, Baldys makes clear that problematic fictional representations of disability occur not because of inherent issues with realism or nonrealism, but because of ableist understandings of people with disabilities. Authors *can* create anti-ableist representations that are not necessarily primarily dependent on realism, claims to authenticity, or even writers who explicitly identify as disabled. In particular, speculative fiction offers an opportunity for new, complex representations of (dis)ability that can provide possibilties and advantages distinct from, yet related to, the possiblities and advantages of disability life writing.[34]

An important difference between speculative fiction and realist fiction is that speculative fiction does not purport to directly reflect reality; rather, speculative fiction brings *aspects* of reality into newly constructed worlds in which realist rules regarding time, space, bodyminds, abilities, and behaviors need not be followed. Critics of feminist science fiction argue that

speculative fiction offers women writers a freedom of style and content that is not restrained by patriarchal realities, and thus these writers can better explore alternative gender identities, roles, and relations (Barr, *Alien to Femininity* xi; Lefanu 2). Critics of black speculative fiction have similarly contended that by rejecting verisimilitude and linear representations of time, speculative fiction opens up "a unique set of imaginative possibilities for a [black American] literary tradition that has long been burdened by the demands of realist social protest" (Dubey, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery" 779).[35] Although criticism on speculative fiction has only recently included (dis)ability, several disability studies scholars have noted that the speculative fiction genre—and science fiction in particular—seems quite concerned with (dis)ability.[36] As scholars of science fiction have similarly argued in regard to race, in many ways issues of (dis)ability are fundamental to the genre.[37] Criticism on speculative fiction that does not consider (dis)ability tends to be based on ableist assumptions of bodyminds even though speculative fiction texts often challenge such assumptions. Disability studies can provide speculative fiction critics additional language and frameworks to discuss the multiple ways in which texts challenge normative assumptions about the possibilities and meanings of bodyminds.

The freedom afforded speculative fiction authors through the rejection of verisimilitude, the use of nonmimetic devices, the disruption of linear time, and other tropes which subvert our expectations of reality are all beneficial to writers who wish to represent a world not restricted by our contemporary racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, and classist realities. Without a doubt, speculative fiction representing marginalized groups can achieve the utilitarian goals of disability life writing and black feminist fiction noted above. Speculative fiction can move people with disabilities, black women, and disabled black women from objects to subjects by making them the main characters, resisting stereotypes, and providing controlled, selected access into the various experiences of these populations. Speculative fiction can do all of this while representing such characters in worlds not restricted by the weight of realism, which limits the parameters of representation. As Lubiano argues, "A marginalized group needs to be wary of the seductive power of realism, of accepting all that a realistic representation implies because of its inclusion of some 'facts.' The reasons for 'real' as a positive evaluation are tied, of course, to scarcity, the paucity of . . . *facts* and *representations* as well as the desire for more" (263–64; original emphasis). Speculative fiction can help fulfill the desire for more facts and representations of marginalized groups while also offering a distinctly different way of challenging ableism, racism, and sexism because the author sets the new rules of their fictional worlds.

Within these new worlds of speculative fiction (dis)ability, race, and gender do not have to have the same physical and mental manifestations nor the same social connotations and regulations. Returning again to *The Girl with All the Gifts,* in the world of the film disability takes on a shifting meaning as initially the children with the fungal infection are treated as disabled and dangerous, but as the infection spreads at the end of the film it becomes clear that the bodyminds of the children will become the norm and no longer be regarded as disabled. In this case, viewers bear witness to the ways that social standards and expectations of bodyminds and behaviors (like whether or not one should or should not eat raw flesh) are major determinants of the definition of disability in a particular society or culture. To take another example, in Butler's *Lilith's Brood* series (also referred to as the *Xenogenesis* series), no major character is disabled in any explicit, realist sense of the term. However, the aliens in the novel are particularly interested in humans due to the genetic possibilities of their cancerous cells which, when adapted by the aliens through interbreeding, allow for fast healing, shapeshifting, and limb regeneration. In this series, what we would consider a potentially disabling condition of the human species is actually something loaded with positive potential—even though accessing that potential means breeding with an alien species and possibily the end of the human race as we know it. Here cancer has a different meaning than it does in our contemporary reality, but this new meaning is real and important within the context of the narrative. As I demonstrate in chapter 4, speculative fiction can defamiliarize (dis)ability, race, and gender in ways that are intellectually and politically productive. By shifting our taken-for-granted social norms, speculative fiction makes unconscious preconceptions about (dis)ability, race, and gender more readily apparent, challenging readers to think outside of the accepted definitions of these categories. The nonnormative nature of the representation of (dis)ability, race, and gender in speculative fiction, however, often requires similarly nonnormative methods of reading and intepretation.

Reading Methods:
Interpreting (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Speculative Fiction

As I mentioned in my discussion of the theoretical foundations of this book, my method for reading and interpreting (dis)ability, race, and gender in speculative fiction is genre-attentive, text-specific, and informed by theories of intersectionality and crip theory. There are three major aspects of my reading method including: rejection of good/bad binaries, going beyond exclusively character analysis, and, perhaps most importantly, reading within the rules of a reality of a text. I will discuss each of these in turn.

First, my reading method refuses the simplistic binary of good representations and bad representations, acknowledging that adherence to norms of one system of privilege and oppression may defy norms of another.[38] For example, women, especially black women, are highly sexualized, yet people with disabilities are often denied sexual expression. When interpreting the representation of a sexualized black disabled woman, then, an intersectional analysis must balance attention to each of these oppressive histories rather than singularly celebrating or condemning such a representation as inherently empowering or regressive, respectively. This reading method also operates from the understanding that the experience of intersectional categories cannot be understood as simplistically good or bad either. Tobin Siebers argues that "disability studies needs to account for both the negative and positive valences of disability, to resist the negative by advocating the positive and to resist the positive by acknowledging the negative" (5). Siebers's argument here is particularly important for the analysis of disability in regard to people of color since purely celebratory approaches to disability identity ignore the fact that people of color and poor people are more likely to acquire disabilities through violence and lack of access of quality medical care.[39] My approach to reading black women's speculative fiction, therefore, understands disability as what Tobin Siebers calls complex embodiment.[40] Understanding disability as a complex experience means remaining attentive to positive, negative, and ambivalent aspects of disability (physically, mentally, and socially) as well as the relationship between all three. My inclusion of the mental in my approach to the complex experience of disability—an aspect that can be lost when using Siebers's original term *complex embodiment*—is particularly important when addressing the social construction of able-mindedness as I do in chapter 2 and nonapparent disabilities as I do in chapters 3 and 4.

Second, my reading method does not focus solely on character analysis.

As discussed above, my use of intersectionality understands (dis)ability, race, and gender to operate simultaneously as identities, experiences, systems of privilege and oppression, discourses, and historically situated social constructions with material effects. By not focusing on identity alone, my analysis throughout this book is similarly not exclusively focused on the disabled women protagonists that populate the majority of my primary texts. While I do perform character analysis, I also build my arguments on plot, narrative structure, and the setting of the constructed nonrealist worlds in which these characters live. This is evident in my reading of *The Girl with All the Gifts* in that the space of the institution/military compound, Melanie's prison-like attire, and the fear, anger, and disgust directed at her by the adults around her are just as important to understanding the racial implications of the film as anything Melanie says or does herself. Recent scholarship on speculative fiction and race has revealed how race operates in explicit and implicit ways in the genre. Isiah Lavender writes, "Science fiction often talks about race by not talking about race" (*Race in American Science Fiction* 7). He asserts that the genre "is actually transmitting assumptions of racism even in stories that are ostensibly envisioning a future where race has become irrelevant" and explicitly racialized characters are absent (20).[41] Similarly, Michael Bérubé argues that taking a disability studies approach to the acts of reading and interpretation "*need not involve any characters with disabilities at all.* It can involve *ideas about* disability, and ideas about stigma associated with disability, regardless of whether any specific character can be pegged with a specific diagnosis" (*The Secret Life of Stories* 19; original emphasis).[42] Analyzing multiple aspects of a text allows me to demonstrate how cultural concerns of (dis)ability, race, and gender appear even when disabled, racialized women and gender-nonconforming characters are not actively present or central to the narrative.

One specific way I move beyond character analysis alone is through my approach to metaphor, especially disability metaphor. (Dis)ability, race, and gender often operate as mutually constitutive discourses that inflect texts even in the absence of explicit embodied representations of these categories. As a result, these concepts can be used as metaphors without negating their physical, mental, and social materiality. This is especially important within disability studies. Following the lead of disability studies scholars such as Ato Quayson, Clare Barker, and Amy Vidali, I read for the metaphoric and material meanings of (dis)ability as well as its intersectional relationship to other vectors of power which may be deployed in opposition

to or conjunction with it. In *The Girl with All the Gifts* Melanie's disease is understood as a disability for the bulk of the film, and yet the way she is treated because of her disease gestures toward a history of dehumanization of and medical experimentation on black bodies. This history is made palpable through Melanie's disability and race in a way that insists on both the material and metaphoric significance of the fungal disease in the film. It can indeed be read as a metaphor of this racialized history, but such a reading must not evacuate the material role of disability in this history as well. I will elaborate on disability metaphors further in chapter 1, as this is foundational to many of my later arguments. Like Julie Avril Minich, my work seeks to expose "the ideology of ability in situations that do not appear immediately to be about disability" because sometimes the texts, events, and issues that seem to be less about disability and more about race are also the ones that most clearly demonstrate "the most violent consequences of the ideology of ability" (*Accessible Citizenships* 98, 121). (Dis)ability operates beyond identity alone and functions to uphold and define (as well as be upheld and be defined by) race and gender.

Lastly, my method of reading black women's speculative fiction grounds analysis within the constructed reality of the individual text and not by current cultural or personal standards of the real or unreal. In other words, I generally accept the rules which structure the text, its characters, and its society rather than reading these aspects of the texts only through or against the rules which structure our contemporary reality. As Isiah Lavender insists, "We cannot assume anything about the world of the sf text because its rules are most likely different from those in our experience of narrative realism—that is to say, we have to first recognize and understand the innate conditions of the sf text before we can grasp the story itself" (*Race in American Science Fiction* 59). While clearly the sociohistorical context of production will influence the nonrealist worlds of speculative fiction, it is important to not allow this influence to reduce the possibilities of interpretation. As with all criticism, there is room for various interpretations, but if a basic premise of the text includes something dramatically opposed to our reality—such as the presence of a disease that makes people need to eat flesh—then we must take such a premise as an important material context for character development and plot. In short, the rules and methods of interpretation must change alongside the rules of reality in a text.

This approach to speculative fiction can become difficult when analyzing (dis)ability, race, gender, and other vectors of power because these terms

may not mean the same thing in our current reality as they do in the world of the text. In some ways this parallels the concern in gender studies, queer theory, and disability studies with attempting to locate a universal woman, gay, lesbian, queer, or disabled subject/identity across all time periods and cultural locations.[43] I similarly suggest that critics of speculative fiction must take a culturally aware, contextualized approach to deploying these terms in regard to the reimagined bodyminds in these texts. As much as possible I use the terms and concepts employed in the text when describing a character's identity positions and explain how such positions relate to our more recognizable cultural categories.

In this book, I primarily reference the categories of gender, race, and (dis)ability. I use the word *gender* to refer to the social categories men, women, transgender, and genderqueer as determined by the character's self-identification or, in cases where the character is not granted interiority or does not communicate their gender identity, how the character is read or represented by the narrating voice. The use of this category in the texts I analyze is consistent with American contemporary realist notions of gender except in the fantasy texts discussed in chapter 4, which feature nonhuman characters. I use the word *race* to refer to the social categories of African American/black, white/Caucasian, Latino/a/x, Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American/Indigenous as typically determined by a person's genetic background, community of origin, skin tone, hair, and other phenotypical features as well as a character's self-identification when available. In the first three chapters of this book, the category of race is relatively stable and consistent with contemporary American notions of race. Again though, in chapter 4, race as we understand it cannot be applied to speculative fictional worlds with completely new racial, ethnic, and species categories. I will discuss the issues of applying gendered and racial terms to speculative fiction texts with dramatically different racial, gender, and species categories in that chapter.

When interpreting (dis)ability in speculative fictional contexts, I adapt Kafer's model of disability, which resists the hard distinction between disability and impairment and understands disability as both relational, meaning that it is "experienced in and through relationships; it does not occur in isolation," and political, meaning that it is "contested and contestable" (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 8, 10). As I began to model in my reading of *The Girl with All the Gifts*, disability in my analyses will be determined by a combination of physical, mental, and social factors. I read a character as disabled

if the character experiences their bodymind as different from others and that difference cannot be better interpreted as gendered, racial, or another type of difference;[44] if that character's bodymind is interpreted from a medical or psychological perspective in the text as nonnormative and in need of treatment or cure; and if a character's bodymind variation is considered nonnormative or deviant by the text's fictional society at large. Note that, as mentioned in my discussion of crip theory, within this wide definition of disability in my work, disease and illness are included, particularly when the disease or illness has extended or permanent effects on a character.

In sum, my approach to interpreting (dis)ability, race, and gender in black women's speculative fiction is grounded in intersectionality and crip theory and is based on three main methods: rejecting positive/negative representational binaries, not being limited to character analysis alone (including engagement with disability metaphors), and reading within the rules of reality of a text as much as possible. I lay out these methods in order to model an approach based in both black feminist theory and disability studies which can be used by scholars within both fields. These reading methods allow me to best demonstrate how black women's speculative fiction reimagines the possibilities and meanings of bodyminds and thereby changes the rules of interpretation in regard to (dis)ability, race, and gender.

Chapter Overview

While the implications of *Bodyminds Reimagined* extend into fields such as critical race and ethnicity studies, women's and gender studies, African American and black diaspora studies, American studies, cultural studies, science fiction studies, and literary criticism, in writing the book, I primarily address black feminist theorists and disability studies scholars (and black feminist disability studies scholars), knowing that, like me, the people in these groups are also working and teaching in the above-mentioned fields and departments. The multiplicity of my audiences shapes the layout and tone of the book. Each chapter spends a significant opening section detailing the major theoretical and thematic issues with which it is concerned before delving into the close readings, using one to three concrete examples to illustrate my arguments. The chapters build on one another, using the theories and arguments developed in the previous ones; however, I have written each chapter so that it can be read and understood on its own as well. This style is intended to be useful for students and nonacademics

interested in specific ideas, texts, or authors I discuss. Further, I have included frequent signposting and numerous footnotes, the latter of which are intended to serve as pedagogical devices to point readers from various educational and disciplinary backgrounds to additional reading in case a particular topic or idea I mention in passing sparks their interest. In terms of tone, I attempt to use accessible, plain language as much as possible and to explain how I am using academic terms when they first appear. I have worked to keep my sentences direct and clear because I hope that this book is useful to a range of individuals, including artists, fans, and activists.

In addition to using accessible language, style, and tone, I also frequently use the first-person perspective. This book did not write itself. The ideas did not come from thin air. They come from me, the work I have done, and the people who have pushed and encouraged my thinking. My use of the first-person perspective claims these arguments as my own, knowing at times they may fail to be as clear, correct, or strong as I want. Relatedly, I also often use the words *we* or *us*. Sometimes *we* means disability studies scholars; sometimes *we* means black feminists; sometimes *we* means the readers of these texts; sometimes *we* means black people; sometimes *we* means any and all scholars, students, artists, and activists invested in understanding how oppressions manifest in our world and how we can resist them in creative, critical, and concrete ways. I use both *I* and *we* because I do not work in isolation; I belong to multiple communities of thinkers who have shaped me and my work. I use *I* and *we* because I am a fat, black, queer, nondisabled woman who identifies with people with disabilities and who hopes to bring my communities together in conversation with one another through my work. If you, reader, do not yet identify as part of this *we*—as part of any of these multiple *we's*—then I hope that you may begin to as you read this book.

Bodyminds Reimagined contains four chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter begins with theoretical and thematic framing and then moves to close readings of one or more texts as illustrative examples. My discussion of the texts in this study does occur in a relatively chronological pattern; however, this is not meant to indicate a linear progressive narrative of representation. I have grouped the texts thematically and arranged the chapters in order to build my overall argument about how the reimagining of bodyminds in black women's speculative fiction changes the rules of interpretation, requiring new modes of analysis that take into account the relationships between (dis)ability, race, and gender and the contexts in which these categories exist.

The first chapter, "Metaphor and Materiality: Disability and Neo-Slave Narratives," argues that fictional representations of disability in slavery expand the neo-slave narrative's ability to represent what was previously unable to be represented within the specific historical and pragmatic contexts of the traditional slave narrative. While black feminist and other literary scholars have traditionally read these representations of disability as metaphors for the long-lasting impact of the violence of racism, disability studies scholars have argued against reading disability as primarily or exclusively a metaphor for trauma. Using Butler's *Kindred* as my example, I demonstrate that by historicizing these representations within the material conditions of slavery, we can read disability in neo-slave narratives simultaneously as metaphors for the legacy of racial violence and as more literal references to the multiple ways in which black people were impaired in the antebellum period.

Chapter 2, "Whose Reality Is It Anyway? Deconstructing Able-Mindedness," discusses how, due to the fact that the world is experienced differently by everyone, reality can be subjective. However, those who actively claim to experience realities considered drastically different from the majority are labeled mentally disabled and potentially forcibly medicated, institutionalized/incarcerated, or harmed as a result.[45] Using the example of Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*, I argue that in rejecting realist norms, black women's speculative fiction can reveal how able-mindedness is socially constructed and upheld through racial and gendered norms and how this social construction impacts the practices of the psychiatric medical-industrial complex and American culture at large. By insisting on the socially constructed nature of able-mindedness, black women's speculative fiction also offers up new modes of historical and institutional knowledge that stem from the perspective of multiple marginalized groups and honors their experiences of the world. In the conclusion to this chapter I connect these ideas to the role of able-mindedness in contemporary violence against black people.

Chapter 3, "The Future of Bodyminds, Bodyminds of the Future," further builds the claim that black women's speculative fiction theorizes new possibilities and meanings of the bodymind by focusing on representations of diverse bodyminds in the future. Many futuristic texts create worlds in which certain realist oppressions and/or social identities have been erased. In particular, speculative fiction often depicts futures in which disability no longer exists due to advancements in technology and race no longer matters because of racial mixing. In this chapter, I explore how, through the representation of the nonrealist disability hyperempathy, Butler's *Parable* series imagines how diverse bodyminds might exist in the future. In particular, this series resists ableist assumptions about a technologically created, disability-free future by emphasizing the importance of context to understanding a person's experience of disability and the possibility of pleasure from/through disability. This chapter also shows how a disability studies–grounded analysis can help illuminate a text's theoretical implications for issues of race, gender, and class as well.

Chapter 4, "Defamiliarizing (Dis)ability, Race, Gender, and Sexuality," analyzes speculative fictional fantasy texts with nonhuman characters, including N. K. Jemisin's *The Broken Kingdoms*, which features a blind demon protagonist who can see magic, Shawntelle Madison's *Coveted* series about a werewolf with obsessive-compulsive disorder, and Nalo Hopkinson's *Sister Mine* about two formerly conjoined twins born from human and demigod parents. These texts defamiliarize concepts of (dis)ability, race, gender, and sexuality in varying ways, thus demonstrating how black women's speculative fiction challenges the supposedly fixed and knowable nature of these categories. In particular, these texts defamiliarize realist disabilities and give them new meanings in their fantastical worlds with nonhuman characters, while also creating new races/species and new or altered gender and sexuality categories. This defamiliarization forces readers to forgo their outside knowledge of these real-world categories and learn about them anew through the perspective and experiences of the protagonists.

Finally, in the conclusion I reflect on the importance of this work to black feminist theory and disability studies. I reassert my central argument and provide suggestions for future research, performing my own reimagining of a speculative fictional academic future for the ideas and topics that this book addresses. I end with a reflection on the role of pleasure in research, writing, reading, and living as a multiply marginalized person.