

HISTORY WORKSHOP

The Department of History

Tuesdays ~ 12:30-1:30 pm ~ 203 Munroe Hall

Objects of Disability

Jaipreet Viridi

University of Delaware

February 19, 2019

12:30-1:30 pm

203 Munroe Hall



Disability is a personal, individual experience, as well as a collective one. Disability is also unique in the extent to which it is bonded with technology, tools, and machines as a medium of social interaction. Things from tele-touch technology or hearing aids used by deaf persons, wheelchairs of all kinds, canes, prosthetic limbs, even, to some extent, 3D printing of body parts—they all reveal the multitude of interactions with disability. In some cases, these technologies even define disability experience. Artefacts used by, and made for, people with disabilities serve as tangible evidence of how social and medical meanings of “disabled” and “abled” were constantly negotiated. This presentation outlines a study of museums, libraries, and archives primarily in Ontario that contain collections of objects of disabilities, and some of the methodological difficulties encountered in finding and archiving objects in a database. Shifting from a “diagnostic-centric” version of disability through the lens of medicine was challenged by the fact most museums categorize prosthetic and assistive devices as medical objects, reducing the lived experiences of users to their medical diagnosis. Using examples from different collections, this paper focuses on how the elucidation of objects of disability allows us to trace different interpretive frameworks by which users addressed their physical/mental impairments, including how social, cultural, and medical factors shaped their identities, or signified their social positions.

Light refreshments will be available before the talk.