The American Chronic Pain Association recommends making decoupage boxes (among other crafts) as a form of pain management.

If being in pain every day necessitates surviving said pain every day which (if successful) results in the state of being a daily survivor, how often or to what extent can “daily” build up on itself before completely obliterating any meaningful definition of “survivor”? What are the temporal dimensions of “survivor”?

The American Chronic Pain Association does not recommend doing manual labor for a living as part of a pain management strategy, especially for those who are legally disabled.

Recently, much scholarly attention has been given to trauma, surviving trauma, and plasticity. Plasticity meaning, very generally,
physical, mental, and specifically neurological changes and growth that occur in the aftermath of traumatic events (whether physical or mental to begin with). These new survivors, people left affectively different, either positively, neutrally, or negatively, are left as such after events that are exactly that: events, as in moments or accidents or temporal instances in some way limited by distinct parameters of time.

Daily

Does being a daily survivor imply that singular events happen every day which must be survived or that the very quality of daily-ness (which includes the qualities of ordinariness and unending repetition) is a traumatic event to be survived? Or, really, is it the pain that needs to be survived or the fact that it happens every day?

Daily Survivor

The American Chronic Pain Association does not recommend doing manual labor while legally disabled because that would be too much like fighting fire with fire (as opposed to decoupage boxes).

Daily

Although, actually, the hidden genius of decoupage boxes as a daily pain management strategy is that decoupage boxes are daily-ness itself and thus making decoupage boxes as a daily pain management strategy fully actualizes fighting fire with fire because both decoupage boxes and daily-ness itself are ubiquitous, all-accessible, everywhere, boring.

Daily Survivor

Being in pain every day is intensely boring.

Harcourt, 2003).
Daily Survivor

Being in pain every day is boring because it does not provide opportunities for personal growth and resiliency in the face of singular traumatic events.

Being in pain every day is boring as a problem deserving academic or scholarly attention because it does not provide opportunities for groundbreaking neurology and positive thinking and personal growth. Even as a problem examined within affect theory and by scholars who study ordinary life, being in pain every day isn’t actually ordinary enough because it is only the realm of the already sick.

The American Chronic Pain Association does not admit that being in pain every day is boring nor do they give suggestions for managing this boredom. (Though decoupage boxes may be a form of admission.)

Survivor

The problem of the boringness of being in pain every day, and part of the reason this is a problem for scholars, is that there is no resiliency. Resiliency is inherently about sponginess, about bouncing back (to normal), about recovery. What kind of recovery is possible when what is wrong is wrong in the very daily-ness of one’s existence?

Daily Survivor

In some ways, doing manual labor for a living as a pain management strategy follows the American Chronic Pain Association’s boring logic, the logic of immersion in daily-ness as a way out of it, because manual labor is what the majority of people do on a daily basis.
As I write this, I am at the public library watching a landscaping crew mulch around trees outside. (Tomorrow I will load bags of mulch into people’s cars as part of [one of] my jobs at a garden center.)

Daily

Being in pain every day is boring because boring is a quality that experiences have; boredom is the state of being bored. So saying “Being in pain every day is boring” is different from saying “I’m bored because I’m in pain every day” because the former identifies the pain as the thing which is boring, it does not mean that I’m bored.

Simultaneously, being is pain every day is boring means finding oneself unafraid, because you cannot be bored and afraid at the same time.

Daily Survivor

You can, however, find something boring and be angered by this boringness at the same time.

Daily

Would it be boring if it didn’t happen every day? Would it be boring if it provided the groundwork for being able to make serious, resilient, personal growth? Would it be boring if I weren’t so mad?

Daily Survivor

Being in pain every day is not about resiliency because when being in pain every day is the only daily state possible there is nothing to resiliently return to; when being in pain happens every day there is never, exactly, a daily return of the pain but simply a repetition. Being in pain every day instead becomes about stamina, because stamina is not about surviving moments or events but about surviving time itself.

Being bored by pain means not being afraid because you cannot be afraid (and waiting) to die and bored simultaneously. Being in
pain and bored means not being afraid of dying (or being too bored to be afraid). But is being angry really any better?

Daily

This bored un-afraidness is not a death acceptance/relinquishing of existentialism because being bored is not about not caring or not taking the pain seriously or deciding to simply spend all your time making decoupage boxes. It is simply what happens when pain happens every day, when you know that pain as well as you know how to unthinkingly get up and make coffee and brush your teeth. The moment being in pain every day turns into being (in pain) every day, it’s boring because do you really find getting up and making coffee and brushing your teeth to be that interesting?

Daily Survivor

Doing manual labor every day is also (sometimes) boring. But it is invaluable as a pain management strategy because if my legs and arms and feet are sore than my stomach hurts less (noticeably): and, I can remember how hard I worked the previous day when it is now the middle of the afternoon on a weekday and I am lying in bed with a hot water bottle and a book doing my other work.

Daily

Being in pain every day is a form of manual labor. This makes the application of words like “management” (i.e. “pain management”) all the more applicable, because being in pain every day is a form of activity that you have to do and manage yourself in doing as you would any other job.

Especially when writing about being sick, writing based either overtly or subtly on being in pain every day, is your other work. Especially when you are contracted for this other work but not for the manual labor day jobs which fund your ability to be in pain and in bed the rest of the time.
Survivor

That being in pain every day is a form of manual labor downplays the significance or importance or value of your ability to survive because at this point you are just doing your job.

It does not, though, make being in pain every day any less boring. Because, ultimately, your task in this job is to simply get through it, to move through time.

Being in pain every day is a form of manual labor in which the hours are unpredictable but endless and ultimately the most precarious situation to find yourself in.

Daily Survivor

Being in pain every day is boring and boredom is not the worst feeling.

Survivor

In fact, boredom is preferable to many other feelings (namely fear) and can even be comforting. Because although being in pain every day with a certain consistency in that pain, there are still moments capable of causing fear or surprise or worry. Being bored is comforting when it means that the focus is on boredom and not on pain.

Being in pain every day, boringly, also means that the boredom itself can be painful, tedious. But even this kind of pain is still preferable.

Daily

Boring-ness is comforting because having everything (even pain) (especially pain) stay the same is preferable when change only means getting worse. Boring-ness is comforting when it means finding stability in a precarious situation.

Daily Survivor

Being in pain every day is boring because being in pain doesn’t
necessarily mean suffering; at least suffering would provide something to do.

**Survivor**

What does the manual labor of being in pain every day produce? The state of being a survivor. Which is intricately twined to the dual nature of the not interesting/tedious mental/physical nature of the boredom of being in pain every day, because it means that the manual labor of being in pain every day is a physical act which produces a mental state, the state of being a survivor.

**Daily**

Doing repetitive manual labor every day is not in and of itself precarious; Sisyphus could at least take a sick comfort in the fact that nothing about his situation was ever going to change (or get worse).

**Daily Survivor**

Being in pain every day is boring and it is an intense privilege to find oneself bored by this pain; this is part of the comfort of boredom, that when it is unending and repetitive it becomes a form of deep boredom. Deep boredom is not a transcendental form of boredom, because it doesn’t make being in pain or being bored at all pleasurable. If anything, it is sub-boredom, so repetitive (and painful) that one cannot even build a narrative of having survived an individual episode of boredom. But deep boredom is still a privilege because being deeply bored and in pain still means not (being dead or) being in such pain as to be unable to be bored. I will take all the moments of boredom I can get.

**Survivor**

Part of the pain of boredom is some sense of shame at finding, ultimately, only boredom and no transcendence in being in pain every day. Being a survivor makes everyone, even and especially those who have nothing to survive (yet), feel better. Being bored helps no one. Which is, of course, the beauty and entertainment value of
life-changing narratives; no one ever tells or is entertained by a narrative of life changed only by its very un-changing-ness.

Daily Survivor

Not only does it fully capture daily-ness, decoupage boxes are also an appropriate metaphor for the particular boredom of being in pain every day, because decoupage is about building up and affixing layers: if being in pain is like a blister, then being in pain every day and finding it boring is like a callus, because one is filled with something and the other only ever becomes more and more of itself, “it’s Infinite contain.”

Daily

Layering up metaphors like decoupage boxes is the only kind of thinking possible about (and within) the boredom of being in pain every day: oblique. Because what is there when trying to face and think about boredom directly? Nothing (pain).

Survivor

Is the failure to craft or produce a narrative of survival a failure of the manual labor of being in pain every day or a failure of the mental (non)work of boredom?

Daily

Deep boredom is or can become a part of this oblique thinking, adding positively to it, because deep boredom is a form of attention. If boredom is characterized by an inability to find something capable of absorbing one’s attention completely, deep boredom is a constant awareness of this inability to fully pay attention to a thing which itself is also always present.

Survivor

The manual labor of being in pain every day is precarious (in part) because it is not a job you are paid to do, but a job that you pay to do, with your attention.

Daily

Although deep boredom is about always partially paying attention to something (else, something you are not capable of giving your full attention to) it does not produce a state of being distracted. In fact, deep boredom prevents distraction because it constantly acknowledges present pain and how boring it would be to fully be in this pain and what a distraction this pain would become.

Daily Survivor

Deep boredom in which pain is paid attention to and always already displaced (by boredom, by not fully paying attention, by refusing to be distracted) is a way of being a daily survivor.

Survivor

On the other hand, deep boredom and an ability to not fully find oneself immersed in the manual labor of being in pain every day means always constantly having to find other things to pay attention to, anything better than being in pain (even boredom).

Death is a Deadline

Being in pain every day, because it is boring, because this boredom must be managed, is a problem not only of pain management but of time management as well. Because, after all, “Death is like a deadline.”

Daily

Having a deadline implies having a product that must be due by that time. The deadline of death means optimizing your pain and time management strategies to produce a narrative of how well you survived before you die.

Death is a failure of management.

Survivor

This deadline shouldn’t be a problem, though, because being bored, especially being in deep boredom, doesn’t mean doing nothing. Except that optimized management and being a survivor in the face of the deadline of death isn’t enough: optimized management, especially of time, should result not only in narrative production but in the production of productivity itself.

Death is a Deadline

But what kind of time management is possible when being in pain every day is boring and does not come with a set or definite disease-related life expectancy? Or, what is the difference between life expectancy as an amount of time and life expectancy as a quality of time?

Daily Survivor

Or, as my coworker put it when telling me about how, upon learning of her rheumatoid arthritis diagnosis, all but one of her professors recommended finding an alternate career to horticulture and landscaping: sometimes in chronic illness it is not just chronic illness but also chronic bullshit.

Death is a Deadline

The chronic bullshit of being in pain every day and finding it boring is a kind of life expectancy.
Survivor

How does anticipating having to survive a quality instead of an amount of time change what it means to be a daily survivor?

Daily

The problem of the boredom of being in pain every day stems not just from the pain itself but from how boring (almost) everything else, like decoupage boxes, seems in the face of said pain. This boredom is inseparable from the anger it produces. Why isn’t anything interesting enough? Why suggest decoupage boxes as an alternative, as if it were really that easy?

Death is a Deadline

Here is an example of the quality that is my life expectancy and the way that I will find it taxing, as in, the way I will have to pay, which is with my attention. Like when I find myself non-bored, reading Donald Hall’s *Life Work* until I am derailed by the sentence “And then Jack found a problem in his abdomen” and I will not remember or pay attention to anything past that on page 8.⁴

Daily Survivor

Although being dead is presumably even more boring.

When “life itself has been put to work,” when the pain and boredom of being in pain every day becomes a form of manual labor to which the rules of pain and time management can (must) be applied, what sort of work ethic is possible?⁵ Just as the problem of being in pain every day is not just about pain but about boredom, the question of a work ethic is about both how to do this kind of manual labor but also about how to ethically hold a position that is predicated on the privilege of being able to find pain boring.

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Daily

Time management includes not just time but the larger area of logistics management, how to move stuff and schedule this moving: how to schedule procedure appointments so they interfere with neither your vacation time nor your (day job) work schedule.

Daily Survivor

Having a strong work ethic is an intrinsic part of the American dream because it’s the route to all success. Despite having however many day jobs and other work, being in pain every day and sick is my all-the-time job. Manual labor, definitely, but this job also involves affective and caring labor. A kind of affective labor closely aligned with (historically) feminine, mothering (invisible) forms of labor, oft taken for granted and long discounted as being actual work. The problem in applying the term “logistics” here, therefore, is that the scale is wrong, because logistics is inherently about massive quantities; it is this mass which institutes the necessity of management. The work of being in pain every day is intensely, specifically, domestic.

Daily

Before moving on, though, to questions of a work ethic and care labor and the work of being in pain every day, I feel the need to further clarify this notion of boredom, though that itself may seem redundant and boring. But it’s because I’m not quite getting it. Yes, being in pain every day is boring and this boredom involves anger and work and time management and attention and it becomes such an embedded part of daily life that it seems not just like a job but like deep boredom: an unending almost non-boring daily-ness that takes work to maintain. But it’s exactly this work that I’ve neglected. Because there is, on the one hand, the very manual labor of being in pain and the affective work necessary to do this pain/work more easily around others, and then, less manually, less physically, there is the work of boredom, the mental and affective work needed to negotiate the constant daily resource drain (on attention, energy) that being in pain every day becomes. This work of boredom is
pure, banal, management, a kind of anti-mindfulness wherein part of the process is always about ignoring something, ignoring physical pain or anger or those decoupage boxes that seem like the only alternative. Or, perhaps, it’s a death deadline-specific kind of mindfulness. Or, it is nothing more than logistics management at its most domestic level, because it is entirely a working life spent “simplifying or accelerating functions of unreasonable banality.”6

Life’s Work

Life’s working means (having to) work to make life.

Daily Survivor

Being a daily survivor is work. In addition to all the aforementioned qualities and conditions of this work, it is, absolutely, a work of narrative. It is work in the form of saying “being a daily survivor is work.” It is work in the form of saying “I am an invalid.”

Life’s Work

Finding one’s life work, coupled with or driven by or dependent on one’s work ethic, is also a key part of the American dream process. Even when one doesn’t or is unable to choose one’s life work and is instead, simply, (simply?) made to have one?

Daily Survivor

Being a daily survivor is a form of life’s work because it is sometimes the only way to make life (work).

Survivor

But, on the other hand, a very big part of the anger inherent in the boredom of being in pain every day is anger at the commoditization

of this kind of pain and the way that commoditization results in the products of heroic survivor narratives.

I am not that kind of daily survivor.

Life’s Work

In a way, having one’s life work chosen for you is an easier starting point than having to start from nothing because it means not feeling pressured to seek redemption or transcendence through work, when, as Donald Hall says, “Work is not redemptive…but it is or can be devoted.”

Daily Survivor

What is the object of devotion required for the work of being a daily survivor? Is being devoted affected, as in, is the quality or outcome of that devotion affected by whether or not it’s actual devotion or an obligation? Is boredom always already apathy?

Life’s Work

The work of writing “being a daily survivor is work” is sometimes work that I do while on my legally mandated half-hour break at my other manual labor day job.

Survivor

By refusing to work towards a heroic survivor narrative, am I a slacker?

Daily Survivor

The labor of being in pain every day is hard work but, simultaneously, hard work is the answer to being in pain every day.

7 Hall, Life Work, 9.
Pain Exists for a Reason

The reason being that pain “provides us with a built-in warning.” The pain and boredom of being in pain every day is a warning against that very boredom.

Daily

Actually, not the exact same boredom of being in pain every day. It is instead a warning of the boredom and pain of not being in (this) pain, of the absence of (the necessity of) hard work. As counterintuitive as this may seem, “pain free” doesn’t always really mean free. Because if you have worked to make your life(’s work), what is the cost of losing that?

Pain Exists for a Reason

On the other hand, chronic pain as experienced by millions of Americans costs “$635 billion a year in medical care and lost labor.”

Daily

While the pain of being in pain every day does carry its own warning, if your pain is caused by or a part of a chronic illness, there’s no real risk in that chronic ceasing.

Daily Survivor

Is the term “lost labor” meant to indicate a withdrawal from the workforce by people who are in pain or does “lost” also carry implications of the fact that care labor, the labor of being in pain every day, is always already lost both because it is not generally considered valuable and because lost can imply invisible or otherwise out of sight?

Daily

My other manual non-lost labor is worth approximately $12/hour (before taxes). My other manual non-lost labor provides more of an income than disability benefits would.

Pain Exists for a Reason

Pain exists as a way of providing work to people who (may) need it.

Survivor

In a review of the television show *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, the critic Emily Nussbaum identifies the protagonist as practicing a “powerfully girlish model of toughness.”

Pain Exists for a Reason

Pain exists a way to provide a powerfully disabled model of toughness.

Daily

The muscles I develop at my manual labor day job are not exactly strong enough to mend internal organs.

Pain Exists for a Reason

Maybe, actually, pain really just reinforces a “girlish model of toughness” because chronic pain is more prevalent among women than men and because (in part) (talking about) being in pain is more often associated with being a wimp than a laborer and wimps are girlish.

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Daily

Maybe pain and its lost labor only reinforces girlishness because lost labor is already in the realm of the feminine in that invisible care labor is predominantly done by women.

Pain Exists for a Reason

The kind of pain that provides a girlishness-reinforcing disabled model of toughness is not daily pain nor the pain of dailyness but is only ever other people’s pain. Specifically, other people’s pain as expressed in heroic survivor narratives.

Survivor

By refusing to work towards a heroic survivor narrative am I a slacker? Or, am I a slacker simply because the work that I do in being in pain every day is unseen?

Daily Survivor

Not entirely unseen by everyone, though, because there is that coworker, and other coworkers as well, other women employed in multiple forms of chronic labor.

Life’s Work

Other coworkers of a kind, because I am thinking of people I do not necessarily work with, but who I know to also be engaged in the work of being in pain every day. The thing about having coworkers in this work, though, is that as much solidarity as can be felt, there is also always a sense that when working to make one’s life(’s work), it is impossible to fully escape the particularities of that life and the work that must be done.

Daily Survivor

When I say that hard work is the answer to the (other) work of being in pain every day, I do not mean the kind of moralizing goodness of
working hard, the kind of moral superiority of self-made men, but that hard work is as good an alternative as decoupage boxes.

Daily

Except in times like these when I am sitting in the library (on my day off) and it is (becoming) very clear that lost labor really only means exactly that — because I am in pain and distracted and anticipating more pain and there is no work that I will be able to get done, hard or otherwise.

Daily Survivor

Hard work is as good an alternative to decoupage boxes as any because it means that my coworkers and I are firmly in the opposite camp as bed-ridden invalid non-workers. Hard work is as good an alternative as decoupage boxes because valuing my labor as it is expressed in a decorative craft project meant only for my consumption means valuing my body as something capable of only that kind of pseudo-production.

Pain Exists for a Reason because Death is a Deadline for Life’s Work

Maybe decoupage boxes would actually be harder than working hard because decoupage boxes seem to imply having to find value inherent in pain instead of value in the things pain allows you to do.

Dead-End Job

Maybe. Or maybe only a slacker in a dead-end job. That is, a slacker made such by the very predetermined unnecessariness of the job. Unnecessary not because the work itself is unneeded but because the dead-endedness of it renders any given task or larger project (slightly) null and void; even a survivor narrative is only valid until rendered invalid by the way that being dead means not surviving.
Daily

The other aspect of being, feeling like, a slacker in this job is the way that being in pain every day becomes automatic. Not the automation of robots capable of taking over your job, but the way that certain physical functions, like pain, automate you. In multiple ways. In the logistical sense of requiring the same basic care functions daily. But also the kind of automation implied by states and attitudes towards states like, for example, PMS, wherein menstruation explains away any “craziness.” (Certain) biological functions absolve you of the responsibility for certain emotional states; it’s only PMS. It’s only the pain talking.

Daily Survivor

Being in pain every day is a boring dead-end job that absolves you of having to be apologetic about the anger, frustration, boredom or general old cranky reclusive-ness that may result.

Daily

Having a dead-end job doesn’t mean having no work, though, because it is still something you’re employed in doing, and thus can be considered a “filled present,” wherein “activity and speed distinguish the filled present, rather than emotional investment.” Simultaneously, the speed that characterizes a filled present may actually be a lack thereof.

Survivor

In the same way that biological functions explain away emotional states, they also invalidate emotions that may, actually, not be inherent. Thinking that it’s only the pain talking renders the pain-having person mute. This is the truth of the process of automation within a dead-end job: having a dead-end job means your agency has become dead-ended, means you are now just a body that does a thing (to

you), that is in pain every day, that bores you and creates mounting bored-frustration which threatens your ability to project (affect) manage.

What, exactly, is the thing that has to be survived about being in pain every day? Is the pain or the boredom worse? Is the fact that thinking about, writing about, being in pain every day necessitates, always, the use of analogy and the laying of other systems over this pain, a symptom of the boredom or an inability to deal directly with certain physical experiences? When trying to think about what it is to survive is an ongoing thing, how can this thinking ever not reset at the end of any day? As in, how can the idea of being a survivor lengthen or expand to encompass a span of time longer than 24 hours? This is why “survivor” seems, as a concept, suited only to people who go through and come fully out of a singular event. Because when you are going through and coming (maybe fully, probably only partially) out of only a day at a time, how is this at all different from just being alive?

Daily Survivor

It’s different because of the pain. It’s different because while “being a survivor” is better suited to singular events, “surviving” can imply an ongoing process, without end, with an ongoing set of emotional processes tied to singular survived events as well as to the affective work of the everyday. This everyday is never, can never, be ordinary (as in normal) but is also simultaneously intensely ordinary, because it happens every day and because pain is, actually, intensely ordinary because it is only ever what (all) bodies do.

Given these parameters of survivorship, what is the measure of success in this job of being in pain every day? Some hugely meaningful end product or simply the drive to create, to work hard at, one? But this all too often is the only mark of successful survivorship, the mark of emotional strength and a best-selling memoir and a foundation in your name. None of this is meaning. Which is why, in addition to actually dying at the end, being in pain every day is a dead-end job: the oppression inherent in the way that certain kinds of survivors are lauded, renders anything you do, as not that kind of survivor, slightly pointless. Or not pointless, exactly,
but meaningless in the eyes of a society that has chosen to value images (of success) over being alive (and knowing when that is success enough).

Survivor

But, at the end of the (this) day, who really can judge you when your only real coworker in the job of being in pain every day is your pain itself?