DISABILITY AND THE DESIRE FOR COMMUNITY

by

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Bringing together disability studies with aspects of diaspora studies and feminist theory, and written through an interpretive methodology informed by hermeneutics and phenomenology, this dissertation explores the phenomena of “disability community.” I analyze how disability communities are enacted through a desire for disability and how such enactments bring new meaning to disability, community, and geography.

I begin by exploring how meanings of geographic spaces and meanings of people, are produced in and through culture in entangled ways. I trace out a few historic examples of how disabled, racialized, and racialized people were culturally produced as ‘non-human’ (‘slaves,’ ‘fools,’ ‘freaks,’ and stateless bodies) by and within geographic sites such as slave ships, ships of fools, freak shows, asylums, and immigration offices. Turning to contemporary examples, I explore how particular environments are culturally produced as disposable, a production closely connected to how their (poor, racialized) inhabitants are produced. I attend to how disabled and racialized people are rendered not simply as undesirable citizens, but as bodies in a perpetual state of ‘unbelongingness,’ for we live in geographic spaces in which we are both undesirable, as manifestations of abnormalcy, and desirable, for the ways that such manifestations are necessary for the
production of normalcy. Turning to the particular geographic space of a university campus, I engage stories generated in interviews. My interviews reveal that a sense of belonging in community is produced by feelings, rather than structures, common identities, or shared embodiments. I explore how enactments—fleeting, unstructured, and, perhaps, unexpected moments wherein people come together through a desire for disability of disability—of community can rework these terrains. I end by proposing that enactments of crip communities ‘crip,’ that is, open up with desire for the way that disability disrupts, ways that we understand disability and how we come together in community.
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The truth about stories is that that is all we are….

- Thomas King, 2003, p. 2

The spoken word is a gesture and its meaning, a world.

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 1
Chapter One: An Introduction to Storying Difference

I was walking home from school one night on a busy street in downtown Toronto. As I was crossing the street, my walking pace—perhaps slow and somewhat shaky—synched up with another’s. Previously apart, we were now communicating with each other through our gait, swinging arms, and sideways looks across the sidewalk. We began to walk together. Our togetherness was not constituted by a sameness in our gait, nor mimicry, not even a stated commitment to stay together in the midst of the busyness of the sidewalk. During the block or two that we walked together, our paths often forked as we independently negotiated the objects and other bodies that prevented us from walking a straight line. We often broke apart from one another, and we always came back together. In the midst of all others, this coming back together was, to me, a clear indication that we desired to be together... if only for a couple of blocks.

Soon after we began this sidewalk dance of departures from and arrivals to one another, this man made an observation which came in the form of a question. He asked, “You have trouble walking?” Undeniably, I walk differently. I suspect this difference can be seen, heard, or felt by most people I walk with or amongst. And sometimes this different walk does give me trouble: the drag of my right toe can get caught up in sidewalk cracks causing me to fall down. But I do not necessarily experience the activity of walking as troubling.

I could have interpreted his question in endlessly different ways. I could have, for example, met his interpretation of my walk as different with indignation or hostility, signaling that I interpreted his question as an indication that he was measuring my
different walk against a normative standard of walking and asking me to explain my
deviation. Perhaps this was what he was asking. But I felt that he was kind and
respectfully curious in his question and, after all, I wanted us to stay together. So I
answered, with a smile, “No, this is how I walk”. To which he replied, “Then why are
you wearing high heeled boots?!” At this, we both erupted with laughter. Together the
laughter continued down the block. It was true; I was wearing high-heeled boots. And
although the heel was not even that high, they caused my already dragging feet to drag a
little more, increasing the possibility of dangerously tripping up in the cracks. After we
laughed together for a few moments, he turned into a church telling me he had to attend a
meeting

... and then we were apart.

~

As a noticeably disabled “walkie” who frequently traverses the streets of my city,
Toronto, I have a strong sense that ableist logic dominates and circulates (Clare, 1999, p.
128). This sense comes from being, or the ever-present possibility of being, stared at,
avoided, or commented on when I am in almost every crevasse of public culture. This
sense also comes from my knowledge that nearly every, no, all noticeably disabled
people I know share similar experiences. My sense that ableism floods dominant culture
is further secured every time I notice stairs to a building without an accompanying ramp
or elevator, with every heavy door I struggle to open, and every time I hear words like
‘crazy’ or ‘lame’ lazily appear in our nomenclature. As someone working in the
discipline of disability studies, I have a strong sense that disability is discursively produced through ableist logic under the “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1980) wherein discrimination against disabled people makes sense; it is collectively tolerated and collectively responded to with apathy, if at all. Ableism constructs the “sensibility” of my culture within which ableist gestures toward, enactments of, and responses to disability make “sense” (Titchkosky, 2008a). In so many ways, I sense that we live in a world that does not value or desire the “difference that disability makes” (Michalko, 2002).

As a disabled person who embodies disability with a mixture of pride and shame (Chandler, 2010), who experiences disability as communally binding, culturally important, and even a desired way of living, I ‘know’ that there are other ways of storying disability. Lives of disability are not only made up of stories of this flavour; stories flecked with discrimination, violence and fear, stories in which disability is culturally produced as nothing more or less than a “problem in need of a solution” (Snyder & Mitchell, 2002, p. 47). There are many of these stories but there are other ones too; stories which describe how “disability can be done differently” (Michalko & Titchkosky, 2009, p. 1), how disability can be regarded as an ontology that is culturally important, a desired political identity, and central to the formation of ‘crip’ communities.

Throughout this dissertation I use ‘crip community’—the animating concept of this work—to refer to any time that community is enacted wherein people come together motivated by or through the desire to dwell with disability; a desire which is antagonistic to the normative desire to cure or kill disability. My use of the word ‘crip’ extends from disability studies scholar Robert McRuer’s articulation of “crip theory,” which, for him,
allows for the creation of a new world in which crip and queer identities are central (2006). By demonstrating the various and productive ways that criping can bring us new understandings of disability and community, and through these understandings, the “creation of a new world,” this dissertation aims to show the work disability can do.

Different Stories of Difference

“The truth about stories is that that is all we are…” (King, 2003, p. 5). Stories make up the meaning of ‘us’. This dissertation will tell many stories of disability, which is why I begin here, in stories. There are many stories and many meanings of disability. Stories of death, stories of wonderment, stories of overcoming… cultural stories, communal stories, love stories are all stories we tell about disability. In his chapter, “On Doing ‘Being Ordinary’,” Harvey Sacks (1985) remarks, “We have assigned a series of storyable people, places and objects as they stand [sic] as something different from us” (p. 419). Disabled people are attended to and storied as different than normalcy’s expectation. Our particular difference is often made to appear as mysterious or, at least, outside of the ordinary… unexpected. And so, as much as disability is always a problem tied to the need for a solution, it is also an unexpected difference tied to the need for a cause. This tie also ties us—disabled people—within what Sacks (1985) called the “series of storyable people” (p. 419). We are asked to story our body: What happened to us?

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Throughout this work I use the word ‘normalcy’ to refer to the construction of the ‘normal’ person—white, able-bodied, middle class, heterosexual man—who, although he is mythical, hold a tremendous amount of power within our culture. In this work, I am particularly interested in how the production of the norm requires, thus is invested in, the production of the abnormal body/citizen. For my understanding of ‘normalcy’ I follow Michalko & Titchkosky (2009) who, in the introduction to their book, Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader, write, “There is no doubt that this world has been built on the foundation of some key dominant interests, not the least of which is the often tacit production and maintenance of ‘normalcy’ as the ‘natural order of things’ and ‘the way things are’” (p. vii).
What is wrong with us? How do we get around? Do we live with regret? Are we loved? These are examples of questions that have all been asked of me, by people I know and also by strangers. It is easy for me to imagine that these or similar questions are asked of most noticeably disabled people. These questions are asked of us in order to provoke an explanation of our difference and not just any explanation, an explanation in the form of a story.

We—disabled people—are always tied to stories; they precede us, they follow us, they are told of us, they are told by us. Stories of disability fill a room or a sidewalk before we enter into it and perhaps different stories linger in these spaces after we leave them. In her article, “Shape Structures Story: Fresh and Feisty Stories about Disability.” Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2007) describes how “shape [disability] structures stories”, working off of historian Caroline Walker Bynum’s assertion that, “shape or the body is crucial, not incidental, to a story. It carries story: it makes story visible; in a sense it is story” (as cited in Garland-Thomson, 2007, pp. 113-114). If bodies shape stories, Garland-Thomson’s article posits, then disabled bodies must shape stories in particular ways.

As highly storyable bodies, disability is storied by almost everyone…. certainly not only disabled people. In all of these stories, the storyteller’s imagination of disability shapes the story. Turning back to the story that opened this chapter, I could have told this story in many different ways, disability could have shaped the story differently. I could, for example, imagine disability as a problem, a thing, located in me rather than as a socio-political phenomenon that emerges between us. I could imagine disability as that which materializes only in a dragging foot that causes a trip; only as that which causes
stigma, social ostracization, and unwelcomed and unkind commentary from others. I could imagine disability as something that (hopefully) gives way to normalcy, as best it can, when I cover up, hide away, avoid, or ignore any of its marks, such as trips and comments. And if any of these were the imagination that I, the storyteller, had, then disability would have shaped this story differently. Given that experience and representation are never separate but always touching (see footnote 2), the way that disability shapes my story, or, in other words, how I story disability, has everything to do with the meaning of the event and, thus, the meaning of disability. Referring to my opening story, had disability shaped the story differently, perhaps instead of engaging in a dance, always finding our way back to each other in the midst of a busy sidewalk, I would have been trying to escape the man in a desperate game of ‘cat and mouse.’ For a different shape, his observation, “you have trouble walking,” might have echoed as an inexcusable offense rather than a careful invitation for interaction. My dragging foot could have easily shaped this story as one of oppression rather than one of communal enactment; the man in the story figured as my adversary, or even enemy, rather than my communal other. A feeling generated between us turned him into my communal other in the midst of many other possibilities.

Stories make meanings of bodies; these meanings are perpetuated, and thus form, cultural imaginations of certain bodies; these imaginations are deployed when we tell other stories of these bodies. And round and round this goes…. Bodies shape stories and stories shape bodies. Disability is typically imagined as a “body-gone-wrong,” a tragic state of affairs (Michalko, 2002). And so it follows that most often, “the story structured
by the shape we think of as disability is not imagined as a pretty one” (Garland-Thomson, 2007, p. 114). Stories that disability typically elicits are often stories of, “despair, catastrophe, loss, excess, suffering, and relentless cure-seeking” (Garland-Thomson, 2007, p. 114). These stories are informed by and also perpetuate the normative cultural imagination of disability as tragic loss. In these kinds of stories, disability is imagined as a ‘thing’—a regrettable, sufferable, curable thing—as opposed to the disability studies’ imagination of disability as a socio-political phenomenon (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, pp. 1, 2, 4). These not-pretty stories, following Garland-Thomson (2007), also imagine ‘normalcy’ to be a thing; a natural rather than constructed thing; an attainable thing (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, pp. 6-7).

Stories that imagine disability as a thing, a thing that is distinctly opposed to the conceptions of normalcy, are told by disabled people too. For, as Titchkosky & Michalko remind, normalcy is a seductive ‘centre’ (2009, p.7). Normalcy as ‘centre’ appears as a ‘somewhere,’ a seductive ‘somewhere’ to disabled people and non-disabled people alike (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 7). From this position, Titchkosky & Michalko write, no one desires to inhabit the disabled body which will always be relegated to the margins, estranged from the ‘centre’ (2009, p. 7). Through this orientation to disability as a ‘wrong body’ positioned in a ‘no where,’ disabled people may tell stories of disability in which their disability is ‘overcome’ in a triumph of ‘human spirit’ in which the disabled person adjusts or adapts in order to live as ‘normally’ as possible (2009, p. 7). When reading or

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3 Here I am talking about normative stories that feature disability, such as overcoming stories, which I understand as distinctly different from stories in which disability is featured only as a trope with narrative function or what Snyder and Mitchell refer to as a “narrative prosthesis” (2001). I understand the two as different because in the former disability is interrogated, albeit interrogated as oppositional to normalcy, whereas in the latter disability is not interrogated at all. For more on how disability is used a narrative prosthesis and what cultural understandings are required to allow for this function, please see Snyder and Mitchell (2000). Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependences of Discourse. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
hearing these kinds of stories of disability by disabled people, we must remember how seductive normalcy is, especially when negotiating an ableist world.

In his introduction to *Disability and Life Writing*, G. Thomas Couser (2011) writes that over the last decade there has been a shift in the memoir genre from issuing the story of ‘some body’ to issuing the story of ‘no body’ (p. 229). Couser (2011) writes that the shifted public interest in ‘no body’ easily made room for the emergence of the now popular memoir of the ‘odd body,’ which often stories the lives of the disabled or ill body (p. 229). After all, if we recall Sacks (1985), for its extraordinary difference, the disabled body is a storyable one (p. 419). According to Couser (2011), initially these self-storied disability narratives did little to offer new representations of disability; in fact, many of them perpetuated the medical understanding of disability as cause for cure or overcoming (p. 229). Given the seductive power of normalcy, as Titchkosky & Michalko (2009) articulate, overcoming stories written by disabled people is, perhaps, expected (p. 7). Such normative stories are expected and thus widely palatable while they do little to offer an imagination of disability as anything other than a tragic state-of-affairs.

However, Couser (2011) writes, disability autobiographies and memoirs that described disability as not just embodiments, but as political identities4 soon followed these normative stories of difference (p. 229).

These ‘different stories of difference’ are the kinds of disability stories Garland-Thomson (2007) is referring to when she insists that the disabled body does more than

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*shape* the story, indeed disability as *shape* makes possible certain narrative structures in which the connection between disability and identity is forged and represented for self and for other (p. 114). Couser (2011) tells us that many authors credit the writing of their disability stories as fundamental to their shift from treating disability as an embodied problem to an identity… stories such as those cited above (p. 233). Couser (2011) writes that it is through writing disability memoirs, such as Kuusito’s *Eaves-Dropping: A Memoir of Blindness and Listening* (2006), that the position of blindness can shift from “a matter of function of eyes to a constitution of I’s” (p. 233). As well, many readers, myself for one, credit reading disability life writing as central to their re-orientation to disability from a ‘thing’ into a socio-political phenomenon to identify as and build community around.

Shape (the body) structure story, disabled bodies may shape stories in particular ways, and through re-storying disability we can undo meaning and make new meaning of disability. I consider re-telling stories of disability, different stories of difference, to be a productive way of filling or bridging what Garland-Thomson (1997) describes as, “the gap between the representation and reality of disability”\(^5\) (pp. 12-15). Narratives, memoirs, and autobiographies may be recognized as projects of resistance, reclamation

\(^5\) As I hope is exemplified throughout this work, I do not imagine what is ‘real’ to be somehow separated from representation. Representation of disability is not simply a reflection of the experience of disability (what Garland-Thomson terms “reality”). Indeed, I imagine experience and its representation to be ultimately connected and in continuous, every-looping relation. How we experience disability has much to do with how this phenomenon appears to us through representation. That we experience disability with others, in a social world, which is the only way we can, means that the very moment—all moments—that we experience disability, we are also and always reflecting it, representing it. Experience and representation are always touching and being touched by one another and in this way it would be impossible for me to conceive a “gap” between “reality” and “representation” (1997, pp. 12-15), as Garland-Thomson does. However, I recall this oft-quoted passage here to gesture towards what many in the disability movement consider to be the work that disability life writing does, namely to represent disability as a complex lived experience, a socio-political phenomenon rather than simply a problem in need of a solution, as it is so often (but not always) represented as in medical, legal, religious and political discourses and cultural scripts.
and emancipation by broader disability studies and activist communities; however, disability stories are not always taken up as such. Couser (2011) praises such stories as indications of a cultural moment in which difference can be, “so readily owned, even flaunted” while at the same time cautioning that these narratives are written by “relatively privileged individuals” and focus “too much on existential and idiosyncratic aspects of their condition deflecting attention from challenges facing less fortunate people with the same disability” (p. 232). Along the same lines of critique, Lennard Davis (1995) warns, “By narrativizing an impairment, one tends to sentimentalize it and link it to bourgeois sensibilities of individualism and the drama of an individual story” (p. 3-4). Other critics, or even cautious appreciators such as David Mitchell (2000), are skeptical of the use of disability life writing out of concern that such narratives represent disability as a singular, isolated experience, a representation which could be antagonistic to disability studies’ understanding that disability emerges between us. In this way, it is feared that disability life writing may “unintentionally reinforce a pejorative notion about disability—specifically that the experience of disability is an isolated one and that the issues addressed are personal problems that do not require social and political action” (Torrell, 2011, p. 321).

I offer this review of how disability life writing is taken up by some disability studies’ scholars in order to nod to the contentions within the field regarding this particular way of representing disability. Disability stories, even those which story disability as social and political highlighting possibilities for identifying and building community around disability, are read by some disability scholars as being out of line with our movement’s aim: to reveal disability as a political and collective experience. I
acknowledge these ‘cautionary tales’ but disagree with the critique that stories are singular or that they do not represent the collective experience of disability.

Margaret Rose Torrell (2011) argues that as they articulate disability communities, disability memoirs can, in fact, construct them\(^6\) (p. 322, my emphasis). More than simply describing moments and interactions of disability community, Torrell claims that Linton’s and others’ disability stories themselves engender disability community by citing other disability authors, scholars and activists (p. 331-332). An example of how a story can engender disability might be that, in telling the story at the start of this chapter, and whether or not it is ever read by the comrade on the street, there is a sense built that walking, walking together, or being noticed as walking differently is a way to orient to the question of community. Disability shapes this story of mine in favour of the possibility of community, perhaps because of my “hopefully pessimistic” (King, 2001, p. 92) desire for the enactment of community. And, thus, for me, community was enacted. Though (officially) singularly authored, this story put a collective experience back into the collective… or, perhaps, it is an indication that it never left. I tell this story with “hopeful pessimism,” knowing that it “will not change the world,” but still hopeful that it will (King, 2001, p. 92). Some may read my story and think that I have relied too heavily on my interpretation of the man’s intentions\(^7\). Others may think that I only had a chance to experience this communal enactment because I live in a city and I am a woman, one who wears high-heeled boots with a normative appeal, no less. They may think that by representing the social sphere as a could-be welcoming space in fact does

\(^6\) Torrell makes this argument throughout her article “Plural Singularities: The Disability Community in Life-Writing Texts” (2011), which closely engages Simi Linton’s memoir My Body Politic (2005), a text describing Linton’s entrance into disability politics and community.

\(^7\) Throughout this dissertation, I aim to make clear the differences between ‘intention’ and ‘desire’ as productive forces.
little to create community with those who cannot leave their house, those who live in the
country, or those who experience sidewalks as exceedingly hostile spaces. And they may
be right.

In any case, despite skepticism and cautionary tales, I do not understand story
writing to be an individual experience and therefore I do not imagine stories to represent
isolated experiences of disability. In fact, as I hope this dissertation exemplifies, storying
disability is absolutely a collective, concerted project of collecting how we matter to and
for each other and how we live together. Writing requires us to imagine our audience, to
be in continuous conversation with known or imaginary others, throughout the project.
Storying disability, a socio-political phenomenon which emerges in the midst of others,
requires us to articulate a collective experience; our memories of disability moments is
bound up in a collective experience which was, and will always be, collectively
interpreted. Once written, our stories arrive, sometimes they are flung, into a collective
space, readied in order to be picked up, interpreted, and used by anyone. We relinquish
(total) control over our narratives through the (collective) act of storying them. In all of
these ways, storying disability is yet another reminder that, as Titchkosky (2007) puts it,
“it is impossible to experience disability outside of our relations with others” (pp. 4-5).
Any gesture toward disability, including storying it, must be a collective one. And
therefore, I believe that storying disability is not incongruent with disability studies’
expectation that disability emerges between us and is experienced collectively. In fact, for
its demand that we be in constant proximity and conversation with others, disability
stories satisfy the demand to collectively represent the collective experience of
community.
For all of these reasons I believe that storytelling is well suited for representing community. I also believe that storytelling is political and necessary for social change. In his article “Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies,” Clare (2001) writes about how some, maybe even most, stories of disability represent this body as the “body-gone-wrong” (Michalko 2000, p. 120). Through these “not-pretty” stories (Garland-Thomson, 2007, p. 114), some bodies are “stolen for good” (Clare, 2001, p. 363). However, “just as the body can be stolen, it can also be reclaimed” (Clare, 2001, p. 363). Clare describes how stolen bodies can be reclaimed through writing different stories of difference and in this way the act of writing stories is a political one. Clare (2001) writes that, “The work of refiguring the world is often framed as the work of changing material, external conditions of oppression. But just as certainly, our bodies—or, more accurately, what we believe about our bodies—needs to change, so that they don’t become storage sites and traps for the very oppression we want to eradicate” (p. 363). Storying disability differently in stories that are not necessarily ‘pretty’ but shake disability from its taken-for-granted position of regrettable body and lost life is political, for this social and collective act not only perpetuates new meanings of disability but opens up space for new meanings to be made. It may be, as Titchkosky (2003) suggests that, “The point is not that stories change, but rather that lives change in telling and retelling of stories” (p. 36).

The work here will highlight and draw meaning from everyday stories of living, encountering, and interacting with disability—my stories, stories that were told to me, and stories that I have read or have heard—following Titchkosky (2003) who “locate[s] the phenomenon of disability in the goings on of everyday life (interaction), in what is produced in this interaction (knowledge/images), and in the built environment (setting)
within which these interaction and knowledge production occur” (p. 7). I continue a
disability studies’ tradition of attending to everyday stories of disability as a method for
revealing disability as a socio-political phenomenon whose shifting meaning is made, and
made again, between us and between us and the world (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009).
This draws on phenomenological informed methods of interpretive inquiry in disability
studies. Phenomenology, in so many ways, is a method of inquiry which requires us to
think carefully about the interactions between us and the world and to consider that this
ever-looping experience of being touched and touching has everything to do with how we
interpret the world and, thus, how we engage in the practice of meaning-making.
According to Bill Hughes and Kevin Paterson (1999), phenomenology—a method of
inquiry that posits the body as “subject as well as object”—is well-suited for disability
studies, particularly for “capturing the [disabled] body” beyond strict conceptions of
biological impairment, for this method of inquiry, “has utility in the comprehension of
collective embodied agency” (p. 598). Again following Hughes and Paterson’s (1999)
suggestion, phenomenology has the capacity to theorize the (disabled) body as, “[ever-
involved] in processes of self-productive activity, at once subjective and objective,
meaningful and material, personal and social, an agent that produces discourses as well as
receiving them” (p. 598). Following Ahmed (2008), Hughes and Paterson (1999),
phenomenologically as subject as well as object, an agent that produces discourses as
well as receives them, and with collective embodied agency is indeed a well-suited

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all work across disability studies and phenomenology.
methodology for this work which interrogates disability as a socio-political phenomenon and its interactions with others, both normative and communal.

**Different Stories, Stories of Difference**

Acknowledging the field of disability studies’ trepidations about narrativizing disability, especially in pursuit of representing community, I proceed by making use of stories, for stories highlight the social character of disability, which is so often written out of normative stories of disability. Let me return to the quotation that opened this chapter, “The truth about stories is that that is all we are….” (King, 2003, p. 5). This quotation appears in the opening chapter of Thomas King’s book of lectures, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (2003). This is a book of stories which story Native life and Native culture in a way different than they are typically storied as a disposable life and culture. In King’s chapter, “A Million Porcupines Crying in the Dark,” he writes about his good friend Louis, King (2001) and says that he his friend were both “hopeful pessimists” (p. 92). By this, King (2001) is referring to how they both “wrote knowing that none of the stories we told would change the world. But we wrote in the hope that they would” (p. 92). “Hopeful pessimism,” I think, might be a position in which we typically begin to tell different stories of difference (King, 2001, p. 92). It is disparaging to live in a culture in which our ontology is typically represented and understood as being disposable and undesirable; a problem in need of solution be it the solution of cure, containment, avoidance, or elimination. It may be defeating to write and share ‘different stories of difference’ about a difference (disability) that we care so deeply about,
knowing that our stories will be read by advisories and skeptics, briefed over, or not read at all. When we write or tell a story, it becomes “loose in the world” and it cannot be called back” (King, 2001, p. 10). We never know who will hold it, who will give it away, and who it will touch. However, as King describes of him and his friend, we must be hopeful in order to tell different stories of these ontologies in the face of our wanted elimination, stories that articulate difference as vibrant, necessary… even desirable. We must tell these stories in the hope that they will change the world (King, 2001, p. 92). We do not necessarily tell different stories of difference in the hopes of speaking over normative stories of difference, replacing the old with the new. Nor do we tell these stories in the hopes of telling stories of disability as the ‘good life’ as a way to override stories which articulate disability as no life at all. Rather, we tell our stories in concert with what Mariam Corker (2001) refers to as “disabled people’s sensibility” in order to ensure that there are different stories of difference in circulation (p. 35).

In his introductory chapter, King tells many stories and among them are two creation or origin stories of how the earth was created. The one he begins with, and spends more time on, is the story of “The Girl Who Fell From the Sky” (2001, pp. 10-21). This is a native narrative of how the earth was created and there are many versions of this story, King tells us. The story, the way he tells it, centres on Charm, a girl who is very hungry and goes looking for some Red Fern Foot to eat. In her search, Charm digs a hole straight through to the other side of the world. While looking down the hole Charm falls into it, landing in the sky. And from this perspective, she sees the earth. Charm falls down to earth, which at this point is a water world, and she quickly discovers that earth is the back of a turtle. The story of Charm then details how the earth was created by the
efforts of all of the animals. Following the story of Charm, King (2001) tells us a Judeo-Christian creation story, the story of Genesis (pp. 21-22). In the Judeo-Christian story, the world was created by God, who created Adam and Eve, along with the rest of the world in seven days, and the world was ruled by one rule. Amidst the thunder of Judeo-Christian monologues, different creation stories, such as the one about Charm, have no place or purchase (King, 2001, p. 21). They get told, King (2001) says, and then forgotten (p. 21). But still, we write and tell these stories, and hear them too, proceeding, as we do, with “hopeful pessimism” (King, 2001, p. 10). And in this re-telling, we know, or we hope, that these stories will be taken up, just as we hear them, and new meaning enacted.

We know that the world must have an origin; it must have come from somewhere. A description of how the world was created is only available to us through stories; this is the only way that we can ‘know.’ King presents us with two creation stories: one Native and one Judeo-Christian, and of course there are many more. Within these two stories, we are presented with two possibilities for how the world was created: We can either ‘know’ that the world was created through the concerted effort and energy of all of the world’s creatures working together, or we ‘know’ that it was created by a solitary, individual act and dominated by an individual rule. Herein lies the problem, or so it seems. These two stories are irreconcilable… if we believe one, we cannot believe the other. If one story is religious, King (2001) writes, the other must be secular (p. 25). Within these two presented possibilities, somehow we cannot culturally locate a possibility that both of these stories could be true… and that many other origin stories could also be true. We know how the world was created through stories and, in this sense, stories produce knowledge… as they always do. We trust stories to give us insight into the truth of our
own creation. And in this space of the unknown that is only knowable through stories, a “creation space” (Brand, 2000) replete with possibilities for multiple, even antagonistic, stories to exist at once—to both be ‘true’—contradictions remain impossible. As King (2003) writes, “We trust easy oppositions. We are suspicious of complexities, distrustful of contradictions, fearful of enigmas” (p. 25). We trust stories to tell us how the world was created and yet we do not believe that different stories that offer different explanations for the same phenomenon can exist together. We are suspicious and uncomfortable with difference.

People involved with disability—disabled people, people in crip community, disability studies scholars—are asked for origin stories a lot. We are likely familiar with questions such as: ‘when did you become disabled’, ‘when did you become interested in disabled people’, and ‘why are you studying disability studies’? Disability is understood as an unnatural state of the body and therefore disabled people are assumed to have acquired disability through an event which can be framed as a story… an origin story. Within an ableist culture disability is considered to be undesirable and therefore interest in crip community or disability studies by disabled people and especially by non-disabled people is curious. Disability is not ‘naturally’ interesting, unless the interest is in curing, containing, or eliminating disabled lives. Therefore, interest in disability, as a way of living that is worth holding onto—desiring to dwell with disability—is questionable. This interest in disability requires explanation. Both being and being interested in disability are unnatural and therefore requires an origin story.

Reflecting back on my opening story, had disability shaped this story differently, I may have heard his question in a different way, ‘You have trouble walking?’, I may have
heard it as a request for an origin story; a solicitation for an explanation for my different walk born out of the observation, which quickly became a background assumption, that my walk was different, and even more so, troubling… unquestionable. Because origin stories are requested from disabled people all of the time, I am familiar with these requests and if I shaped disability differently, I could have responded with such an explanation for my different walk. If disability shaped this story, and indeed shaped my life, as a problem in need of a solution, I might have, for example, answered ‘Yes, I have CP, and this condition makes it difficult for me to bend my right foot up which causes my foot to drag. And so yes, I do have trouble walking.’ Disability could have shaped this story in yet a different way; I could imagine disability through a social model perspective, which, according to The World Report on Disability (2011), imagines disability as “the interaction between a body with a health condition and its environment” (Shakespeare, 2012). Had this imagination of disability shaped this interaction and/or my storying of it, I might have answered this man’s question with, ‘I have a different way of walking and if the sidewalk was smooth instead of full of cracks in which my toe gets tripped up, I would not have any trouble at all.’

Both of these origin stories calling up explanations for my anomalous body, each of which could easily be argued to be the ‘true’ origin of my disability would have rendered my decision to wear high-healed boots laughable… and in fact it was. (I rejoin mentioning my impractical choice of footwear, not to prove these aforementioned imaginations of the origin of disability as ‘wrong,’ but, rather, to point to the

9 While I do imagine that the meaning of humanness and geography (environment) are intensely connected, and explore this throughout this work, particularly in chapter two, I do not follow a social model of disability throughout this work.
complexities and contradictions which we all embody which may not easily, if at all, be explained.) I know that questions will be asked of me which beg a storying of my body, for disability is a questionable difference. And recall, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (King, 2001, p. 5). And so in the telling of these oft-requested stories, I have the occasion to story my disability differently and, thus, make the meaning of who ‘we’ are—me and the people who engage me—emerge differently. My answer, ‘No, this is how I walk,’ with a smile, shaped by my understanding that disability is a socio-political phenomenon whose shifting meaning is shaped by and through interactions with others and the world, was my attempt to open up an invitation for the man and I to make meaning of disability. His response, the laughter that followed, and the feeling I was left with indicated to me that we collectively enacted a meaning of disability as something worth dwelling in and smiling about. And thus, for me, community was enacted.

Normative culture is flooded with narratives of disability as problem and in this terrain, stories of desiring disability have no place or purchase, much like King’s story of Charm. More than this, recalling King (2003), our culture, “Trust[s] easy oppositions. We are fearful of enigmas” (p. 25). And in a culture that does not hold contradictions “carefully and honestly,” we can easily get tripped up when we tell different stories of “the difference disability makes” (Clare, 2003, p. 257; Michalko, 2002). For example, stories I have wherein disability materializes as a prideful embodiment are easily elided when I or someone else tells a story wherein disability materializes as a shameful state-of-affairs. Similarly, if someone tells a story of how forced drugging has had a negative impact on their life and someone else tells a story about someone who is ‘really’
depressed and needs their drugs, the former is disproven in favour of the latter\(^\text{10}\). Absent is the possibility that disability is experienced, and thus storied, in a myriad of ways. Disability can be embodied with pride which can quickly be wielded into a body of shame by a trip in the midst of others….and then can turn back again into a prideful identity (Chandler, 2009). We can hold disability tenderly with a mixture of pride and shame. Disability pride can comfort, without eliminating, feelings of shame. Disability shame can motivate us to seek out comrades that embody disability with pride. Disability stories rarely unfold in a straight line. And, when we hear stories of disability we must remember that, as I have said earlier, different stories of disability are often not meant to represent the live of disability as only and always good… these stories are nuanced. In these stories, we are able to hold our contradictions “carefully and honestly” (Clare, 2002, p. 257).

Towards the end of his chapter, King (2003) writes, “Stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live” (p. 9). For we are “chained to stories,” we proceed with “hopeful pessimism” and try to imagine not disability as ‘ends’ but as a ‘difference,’ even if our different stories of difference are not easily told or easily heard. Stories can create and perpetuate new meanings, new meanings of disability, and through telling them, we can express that it is rarely that disability is ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ but

rather the life of disability always exists somewhere in between. King (2003) ends this chapter writing,

Take Charm’s story, for instance. It’s yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to your friends, turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don’t say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now. p. 29.

And this is the power of stories and how they can change how we understand, and thus the meaning, of disability. This dissertation takes up stories as ways of knowing, acknowledging that through creating and telling stories, meanings are assigned to bodies, people interactions, and other life events. With stories, meanings also shift and new meanings emerge…

**Mapping Critical Clarifications**

Throughout this work, I interrogate how communities of alterity both provoke and are provoked by what I refer to as ‘different stories of difference’ and through these stories new meanings of disability and (its connection to) community emerge. By ‘different stories of difference’ I refer to ways that we story difference—disability, facial difference, madness, illness—differently than they are usually storied in dominant culture as a problem in need of solution. As I attend to different stories of difference and their pedagogical possibilities, I strive to resist normalizing disability in order to both hang onto the difference that disability makes as well as, “to think about how the body is marked not only by disability, but also by race, class, sexuality, age, time, geographic location, and physical space, too” (Goodley, 2011,
In the context of this work, we must think about how bodies of difference are interpolated differently in ableist places as well as spaces of alterity, fleeting as they may be (Campbell, 2009). In this section, I think through the different ways that disability appears within the “alterity of disableism” (Goodley, 2011), or what I sometimes refer to as “normative terrain” throughout this work, drawing on McKittrick’s (2006) work, through a process of “clarification,” a term I borrow from Anne McGuire (in press). Throughout, I trace this process of clarification and I introduce it here by thinking through how disability appears differently in my preferred social space of inquiry, the sidewalk, in order to engage the cyclical connection between representation, social expectation, and experiences within an “alterity of disableism”, which Goodley (2011) constitutes as the non-disabled world. I do this by thinking through my own experiences and that of another, who I identify as a crip community member, living in an alterity of disableism in which various representations of disability circulate, representations which inform cultural expectations for disability, expectations which impact experiences of disability.

I am a physically disabled, white, adult woman who walks with Cerebral Palsy (CP). For me this means that when I walk, my right foot drags at the toe and my balance may appear to be ‘off.’ My disability is quite noticeable and it appears and is interpreted in different ways, at different times, in different spaces. My disability does not appear in isolation; it appears attached to my body, within social space (a space largely inhospitable to disability). My disability appears as a difference, a difference requiring an explanation through an origin story, in the midst of a world wherein disability is not typically called upon as an explanation for difference. I have noticed that while I may be read as disabled eventually, typically my difference is initially storied by some other explanation. In those
initial moments of recognition, disability and impairment are not readily called upon as an explanation and, thus, I am interpreted as “abnormal” rather than disabled or impaired. The various ways disability is (or is not) represented in alterity of disableism informs cultural expectations of disability (or what is offered up in place of disability as an explication for my different walk and the different way I hold my body). I am not expected to be disabled, and, therefore, other explanatory stories are recalled in order to make sense of my difference. People come to understand my body through these explanatory stories that circulate within the alterity of disableism (stories which reflect cultural representations) and these stories teach people how to treat me. Thus representations inform ways of knowing, which affects how I experience my body in an alterity of disableism.

In certain cultural situations—walking through a busy part of town on a Saturday night, for example—my disability, specifically the ‘off-ness’ of my gait, may appear to be a result of drunkenness and I am interpreted as such. People I pass by may holler at me telling me I have had too much to drink. Instead of being too much, I have now had too much. Others may invite me to join their party. The solution for my too-muchness is not for me to be arrested and subsequently incarcerated, as it is for some. The recognition of me as drunk, in the face of many other interpretive possibilities, tell me something about the kind of drunk person I am interpreted to be. I am the kind of person for whom it is culturally appropriate, even expected, to be drunk. I may, in fact, be drunk (although this is not necessary to my interpretation as a drunk person). My representation and subsequent cultural treatment is clarified by not only the time and space (I am not, for example, interpreted as drunk when I am walking to my office at the university) but also
by other identities written on my body, such as gender, race, class, age, and sexuality, as well as my location—city streets—at the time—Saturday night.

I know someone who has CP that causes him to walk in a way similar to me. He is a black man of a similar age to me living in an American city. When I met him, admittedly in a moment of attempted communal bonding, I asked this man if his CP-ness had ever been mistaken for being drunk, sharing with him that this was somewhat of a common experience for me. I assumed that he had and hoped that we could swap stories about this shared experience, an experience which I crave and value as indicative of being in crip community. Instead of my anticipated response, he told me that he rarely gets interpreted as drunk. He told me that, similar to me, if he were to walk in particular areas of town at particular times of the night, he would run the risk of being interpreted as drunk. Dissimilar to me, he told me that this interpretation, for him, had violent effects. For example, interpreting him as drunk, other men would start fights with him. Women would act in ways that told him that they were frightened of him. He told me that being interpreted as publicly drunk had the potential to provoke police brutality or to land him in jail. And so, while there was an ever-present possibility that he would be interpreted as being drunk when he was walking in the city at particular times, he told me that he avoided such situations and, thus, he rarely experienced being interpreted as such. For him, the risk was too high.

This man and I walk in a similar way and our walk—a manifestation of our physical impairment—is similarly interpreted as the result of being drunk within an alterity of disableism wherein disability is rarely called upon to narrate difference. There is also difference in our shared experience; the interpretation as being a publically drunk
person brings with it a different set of risks for each of us. Difference we share, but we are interpolated as different kinds. I am a ‘party girl’; he is a potential predator. I have *had* too much and should go home; he *is* too much and should be contained. In this way, our experience is not absolutely similar, but it is not entirely different, either. This is because our experience of disability in the social world is not exclusively determined by the corporeal, but also, in part, by how our body appears and is socially and geographically produced.

Goodley (2011), in a way similar to Lennard Davis (2006) and Robert McRuer (2003), suggests that, “While critical disability studies might start with disability, they never end with it, remaining ever vigilant of political, ontological and theoretical complexities” (p. 157). I share stories of two different interpretive possibilities in order to suggest that to remain vigilant of such complexities, especially when we think through different stories of disability, requires more than a straightforward intersectional analysis that accounts for how different identities live inside of the same body and, then, tells a story about how that body experiences racism *on top* of ableism. Rather, as I think the above story demonstrates, the complex way that different identities live in the same body may be more effectively thought through as a process of clarification. Disability is *clarified* by race. Race is *clarified* by disability. I prefer the word “clarification” to the word ‘intersectionality’ because of the way that this word refers to how meanings get assigned to bodies in social space through processes of interpretation (McGuire, 2013).

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11 Intersectional theory was initially developed by feminist and legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in her 1989 article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics.” Crenshaw developed this theory to illustrate the multiple causes of discrimination against black women. Crenshaw writes, “…if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination…” (1989, p. 149). Since Crenshaw put forth her idea of intersectionality in 1989, this theory
Bodies are interpreted as a whole, rather than in parts. We make meaning of bodies in the brief moments in which they first appear to us. We recognize bodies as we encounter them and we make meanings of bodies—we interpret them—in moments of what Van Manen (1990) refers to as “pre-understanding” or pre-reflective thought (pp. 49-50). In the initial moments of an encounter, when meanings are made, we do not—cannot—explicitly, reflectively, posit how race intersects with disability. When someone notices a dragging foot, for example, they do not simply read this foot as disabled, or disabled mistaken as drunk. We are not recognized as disabled people and, then, racialized people. The man in my story is not pitied as a disabled person and, then, feared as a black man. It is possible to be both pitied and feared, of course, however this linear arrangement of interpretation as one after the other does not quite capture the mixed-up process of social recognition. In the moments of pre-reflective thought, we do not wonder how a racialized person experiences disability differently than a non-racialized person (although we may wonder this at some point). We do, perhaps, notice difference, an appearance which brings with it flashes of explanatory stories addressing the inevitable question, how did this foot become one that drags? There are a number of potential explanations.

We notice this foot as one connected to a body with that body existing in social space in a particular time, and, therefore, we refer to these social factors to cobble together our explanation stories. The explanation stories that come to us are informed by has been elaborated. Lawyer and activist Mari Matsuda (1997) introduced the method of “ask[ing] the other question,” suggesting, “When I see [sic] something that looks [sic] racist, I ask, ‘Where is the patriarchy?’” (p. 1189). I am asking similar questions when I engage how disability is clarified—becomes legible—through race, gender, sexuality, and geography. I prefer to think through clarifications as this process does not predict or prescribe of identities or systems of oppression are experienced. Rather, such an analysis understands such co-mingling as a becoming.
how we understand difference, an understanding that comes to us, in part, by how
difference (and different ways that differences clarify each other) is culturally
represented. And this understanding of difference informs how we treat people who
embody difference. In this way, the representation, experience, and treatment of disabled
people are cyclically connected; there is no distinction between the representational realm
and the real. As an example of how cultural representations of disability are entangled
with the cultural meaning we assign to disability and disabled people, and to give a
popular disability studies adage a neoliberal, biopolitical twist, I consider how, while
many disabled people are pitied, not all disabled people are recognized as those in need
of pity. We pity disabled people because we understand them as having their/our lives
lost or stolen, rendering us inanimate, and thus, pitiable. However, in order for life to be
understood as lost or stolen, and for that loss to be understand as regrettable, we must
first recognize this life to be valuable. We value differences differently, some differences
we do not value at all. My life may be stolen, while other’s—his life, for example—are
valueless. No life, no loss. I think about this cyclical relation referring to two stories I
shared above. Both the man and I have CP and we walk with CP in similar ways: we both
drag our feet. Our walks are both interpreted as out of the ordinary, both requiring
explanations. As it happens, in particular times and spaces, both of our dragging feet
appear as abnormal and our abnormalcy is explained through the story of drunkenness.
As people understood as drunk, we walk, with our dragging feet, into certain cultural
scripts about drunken people; cultural scripts formed from representations, scripts which
tell us something about how to treat people. The cultural script that I walk (or stumble) is
informed by other marks on my body. I am not simply recognized as a person who is
drunk, who is then, subsequently, recognized as white, as a woman, and so on. In the crucial moments of pre-reflective thought, I am recognized as all of these embodiments at once, entering into a tangle of social expectations, a tangle which cannot easily be pulled apart. This man also enters into a tangle of social expectations, which provokes a different experience of disability.

So, as much as we share a point of connection through disability, and, more specifically, through our shared impairment, and still more specifically, through the similar way in which we walk, which is similarly interpreted, this man and I also have a number of points of departure. The script I stumble into makes sense of me as a party person, perhaps a “party girl.” When I fall out of being recognized as drunk and fall into being recognized as disabled, I enter into a whole other, but not entirely distinct, set of cultural scripts. This transition is easily remarked upon as a man might call out to his friend, referring to me, “I just hit on a handicapped girl. Gross!” I do not know what it is like to negotiate spaces of alterity of disableism as a black man with CP living in an American city through an embodied experience. I do know, from this man’s story, that he walks, shuffles, stumbles into a different set of cultural scripts. These scripts, cobbled together from his marked body, narrate him differently. He is expected to be dangerous, violent, a sexual predator. And he is treated as such… with violence. There is difference in our shared experience but, nonetheless, we remain together in community. I take the time to think through how we share points of connection and also points of departure in the introduction to this work on community in order to suggested that crip community, though built upon and through shared understandings, and experiences, are filled with differences, too. As I demonstrate throughout this work, differences in experiences are
not indications that we do not share community or that community has failed us, but, instead, possibly, that we may be able to feel a sense of belongingness at the same time as we experience dissensus. We may even be able to experience “dissensus” through such experiences (Ranciere, 2009).

The Challenge of Crip Communities

I chose to open with this particular sidewalk story of meeting a man on a busy sidewalk while wearing high-healed boots because it describes how I often experience crip community, that is, spontaneously enacted with people whom I would not necessarily expect to be communal others in unexpected places at unexpected times within the normative terrain. And in this way, this story of crip community highlights the main themes that I wish to address in my dissertation; namely, how crip communities can ‘crip’ common understandings of disability and also community. I use crip as a verb. To crip is to open up desire for the way that disability disrupts (Fritsch, in press). Throughout this dissertation, I will reveal how crip communities challenge our commonly-held understandings of community by disrupting the interlocking points of who ‘we’ are (communal members), how ‘we’ come together (communal formations), and what binds ‘us’ together (communal investments). When we attend to crip communities in the way that they emerge in, perhaps, unexpected ways, I propose that we will open up to how these communal spaces can rework the normative geographic terrain, if only for a moment, wherein commonly-held, or normative, meanings of disability are challenged and new stories of disability are generated and perpetuated. By normative meanings of disability, I refer to the way we have normally come to understand disability, as an
individually located problem in need of a solution, be it a cure, rehabilitation, institutionalization, assimilation, and other ways of removing disability from or managing disability within our social, cultural and political landscapes. I suggest that by opening up desire for the way that crip communities disrupt the way we commonly understand both disability and community—if we crip—new and productive meanings of each will emerge.

Crip communities ‘crip’ community by disrupting and reworking three interlocking points of who we are, how we come together, and what binds us. Crip communities disrupt the assumption that we can ‘know’, unquestionably, who our communal members are, and therefore who they are not. Typically we assume that members who share the same or similar embodiments, identities, interests, or political convictions constitute communities or, at least, potentially so. However, given their figuration, that is, the way ‘we’ come together as a ‘we’ exemplified in my opening story, crip communities unwork the taken-for-granted relationship between identity (the individual) and community (the collective). Crip communities unwork this relationship by telling us that our communal others are unknowable or unpredictable. Identity is always forged between people, much like disability, and it therefore changes through and with encounters. Identity cannot be counted on as assuredly known or knowable, nor can it serve as a “stable core” (Hall, 1996, p. 1). And because identity is never stable, the relationship between an individual identity and the communal collective is not straightforward or predictable. Even when we do “know” our communal others, crip communities crip communal formations that imagine that identity brings us into a community in a way that is uncomplicated and unchanging. The man I met on the busy
sidewalk, for example, was not, as far as I knew, disabled. He did not appear to me as an obvious political or communal ally; in fact our interaction could easily be described as antagonistic to the politics and practices—ways of being, relating to and interacting with disability—expected in my crip community. Before our interaction, I likely would not have identified this man as my crip communal member, but with him, and through our interaction, I felt “at home” (Michalko, 1998) in my disability and community.

Crip communities can emerge at anytime with anyone, provided that they share in the communal desire to dwell with disability. I have many examples of crip community homes, that is, spaces and places wherein, and filled with people with whom, I can count on the enactment of crip community with a fair amount of certainty. However, I also experience crip community within unanticipated moments and interactions with others; interactions that I feel have been motivated by the desire to be with disability, and, thus, I feel community. My opening story reveals how crip community was enacted within the normative geographic terrain, as is its only possibility… even structured communal homes exist within the landscape of normative geography which cannot be transcended. The enactment of community, therefore, reassigns meaning to our normative geographic terrain giving us a “different sense of place” (Brand in McKittrick, p. xxvii). And in the way that crip communities are created through unstructured communal enactments, crip communal formations crip the way that we imagine how communities are structured.

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2001) writes, “Out there, on the streets, all sorts of dangers lie in ambush; we have to be alert when we go out, watch whom we are talking to and who talks to us, be on the look-out every minute” (pp. 1-2). On the space of streets, enactments of disability as violence “lie in ambush” (Bauman, 2001, p. 1),
indicating that ableist logic circulates within, and normative understandings flood, our social landscape. I expect these enactments of disability as violence, but I don’t know when, where or how they will occur and, in this sense, they “lie in ambush” (Bauman, 2001, p. 1). I know that when I am traversing the social landscape, sidewalks and the like, I will be more likely to encounter enactments of disability made meaningful as a problem. This ever-present possibility, and often-fulfilled social promise, has a feel. The streets may feel unsecure, unsteady, hostile…. And these feelings feel familiar. In inhospitable spaces, I may feel unwelcomed, undesired, uncommon. And because being on “alert,” that is, expecting the enactment of the normative meaning of disability, feels so familiar, it feels different when disability is enacted otherwise.

Bauman (2001) also tells us that community has a feel (p. 1). In contrast to feeling “insecure” on the streets, Bauman (2001) writes, “In community, […] we are safe” (p. 2). For example, when the man approached me on the busy street and asked me if I had trouble walking, I did not anticipate that together we would enact community. I likely predicted that together, provoked by his question, we would enact a normative understanding of disability; namely, disability as troubling. I might have even braced myself for the feeling of being ambushed by the enactment of a normative understanding of disability. However, as the man and I walked, talked, and laughed together, I began to feel as though he was attracted to, rather than repelled by, my disability. With this man, together in our interaction, I felt a sense of belongingness that I previously did not have both on the busy, slippery sidewalk and in disability. I felt safe; I felt comfortable; I felt desired; I felt secure; I felt differently from how I commonly feel when I am in the normative terrain whether or not I am being ambushed or anticipating being ambushed; I
felt the way that I feel when I am in my community/communal homes. The culmination of all of this, and perhaps an unknowable ‘more,’ made me feel differently in my disability than I had previously felt. Community emerged… its feeling was enacted. Through the enactment of crip community, my embodiment, its meaning, and its location was re-worked… if only for a moment, but a moment that lasted.

Throughout my dissertation, I use “enactments” to refer to unstructured times and places wherein crip community emerges. I take ‘enactments’ to mean the attribution of meaning to phenomena; in my work, the social phenomena of disability. By enactments of this informal sort, I refer to the actors, activities and situations involved in the unstructured, unexpected, spontaneous interactions that socially produce or do crip community. Following Titchkosky (2008), I acknowledge that the concept of ‘enactment’ “is not rare nor new to social thought” (p. 18). Indeed, ‘enactments’ is not a new concept to disability studies. Throughout her book Reading and Writing Disability Differently: The Textured Life of Embodiment (2008), Titchkosky (2008) uses the term ‘enactments’ to attend to appearances of disability, “to pursue the possibility of scrutinizing what we are doing to make disability present” (p. 17). Titchkosky’s book engages how it is that disability appears in text and how such appearances contribute to the meaning we make of disability. Thus Titchkosky (2008) asserts, “Attending to enactments allows for the question: ‘When we read something about disability, how is the meaning of disability enacted in our lives?’” (p. 18). Similar to Titchkosky’s (2008) project of attending to the meaning we assign when we read and write disability, I also

12 I explicate my use of the term ‘enactment’ starting on page 178.
13 Scholars such as Titchkosky (2008), Butler (1993; 2004; 2005) and Mol (2002) have used ‘enactment’ as a political, theoretical and analytic concept. I explain how I employ this term in chapter four.
attend to enactments in order to uncover how we “do” disability between “ourselves and others”, specifically how we “do” disability communally (p. 17).

The meaning of disability is never static\(^\text{14}\)—from moment to moment, from interaction to interaction, from space to space, disability is enacted, and is enacted to mean differently. Disability is typically enacted as a problem in need of a solution; a problem to be managed; a problem to be stared at\(^\text{15}\); a problem to be commented on; a problem to be avoided. Disability is made meaningful as a problem. Sometimes, however, the meaning of disability is enacted differently… communally, and not necessarily as a problem. And these are the enactments that my dissertation will attend to.

My story of meeting this man on the sidewalk while wearing high-heeled boots is a different story of difference… a communal one wherein the meaning of disability was enacted differently than it normatively is enacted in our culture. Together, the man and I created a “sensibility” different than an ableist one, and through it new sense, new meaning, of disability was enacted. This story of disability in which disability emerges as desirable does not crip the space of the sidewalk forever… this story, like all stories, is fleeting. However, this story’s impermanency does not render it unimportant. We must tell these kinds of stories even though, much like King’s story of Charm, The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, different stories of disability can easily be elided by a dominant one…. And forgotten. I could have let the imagination of disability as strictly negative ontology shape the story of meeting the man on the street, but I could have also recognized this interaction as a communal one and then forgotten. There have likely been

\(^{14}\) Disability studies scholars have theorized extensively about how meanings of disability are always made between us, particularly Michalko (1996; 1997; 2002) and Titchkosky (2003; 2007; 2008).

\(^{15}\) For more on how the “stare” is the common and socially-sanctioned way through which we visually interpret disability, please see Garland-Thomson’s (2002) work.
many enactments of community that I have been involved in over the years but have faded away with memory. However fleeting a story may be does not make it unimportant; perhaps importance lies in the act of its telling. Much like stories that shape bodies and space differently, community, too, is fleeting. Community slips, even sometimes at the moment that we think we have a hold on it. The man I met on the street went into a church after only a block of walking together… as soon as community was enacted, it was gone again. However, much like stories—and here the distinction between ‘community enactments’ and ‘stories about community enactments’ becomes all the more blurred—the fleeting character of community does not render it unimportant, not provocative, or unworthy of engagement. My slipping communifying experience with the man may have changed my experience of that particular street block forever; I may think of him whenever I pass by that church… or maybe not. To be sure, that I experienced the enactment of community unexpectedly with a not necessarily knowable other means that we can never know crip community in totality—where it is, when it is, or with whom it will be enacted—for it will never totally ‘be.’

In “An Overture,” the first chapter in his book *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Bauman (2001) begins by describing community as “feeling good,” “a ‘warm’ place, a cozy and comfortable place,” somewhere where we are “safe,” “comforted,” where consensus is not thought of as an achievement but a starting point” (pp. 1-2). Following this idyllic version of community, Bauman (2001) writes that what the word community evokes is “everything we would like to experience but seem to miss […] what we lack to be secure, confident and trusting” (p. 3). “In short, Bauman (2001) continues, “‘community stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available
to us—but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and we hope to repossess” (p. 3). In Bauman’s thoughtful configuration, community is something we wish for, but we miss. In order to ‘miss’ something, it would seem, we must either have had ‘it’ in our grasps—missing a dear friend, for example—or have had it presented to us but, for whatever reason, it slipped away. Missing a ball, for example, requires that the ball was thrown to us, to begin with. Moreover, it is also likely required that we attempted to catch the ball, rather than show no interest in it. Perhaps the ball touched our fingertips and then slipped away from us. To ‘miss’ something, then, requires that we once had attachment to it, or desired as much. To ‘miss’ something also requires that we do not currently have it in our possession.

Bauman (2001) describes community as a paradise lost or a paradise still hoped to be found, but, assuredly, not a paradise we currently inhabit or know from our experience (p. 3). While I agree with Bauman that community is not somewhere we currently inhabit, I would offer that community is not a paradise we could ever inhabit. Perhaps community is something we desire to be attached to, but we are always missing. At the very moment we have it, feel it, at our fingertips, it is lost again…. It slips away from us. Again, that community may always be fleeting—something we once had or almost had but then we missed—does not have to dissuade us from seeking it out and noticing it when we do find it. As we have it, we lose it; as we lose it, we begin to find it again.

I have chosen to attend to unexpected and surprising enactments of community not to dismiss the labour, care, and work that goes into building and sustaining structured disability groups and/or communities; but, rather, because such attention allows me to uncover the could-be uncommon or not-necessarily-considered ways in which we belong
in and to a community through which we find “safety in an insecure world,” following Bauman (2000). Describing, noticing, and thinking about unstructured enactments will also allow me to explicate how community is socially achieved by and through the coming together of two or more people whose coming together is motivated by the desire to dwell in disability. Taking interest in the unstructured production of community also requires us, and I believe productively so, to blur the communal boundaries distinguishing the inside from the outside of community. Paying attention to how crip community is already being done will strengthen our communal understanding of who and what ‘we’ are.

Crip communities need not be made up of knowable others, and they do not necessarily occur in predictable spaces or times. However, crip communities do bind ‘us’ together as a ‘we.’ And this brings me to the third way that crip community crips community. Bauman (2001) posits that all communities are bound together by a shared understanding (p. 11). Following Bauman (2001), I propose that ours is bound by the “shared understanding” or communal investment in the desire to dwell with disability; a desire that is accessible to anyone, at anytime, in any space… yet this desire rarely materializes and, thus, crip community is rarely enacted. Crip communities, in my figuration of them, are bound by a common investment rather than a shared identity. In other words, you do not have to be a crip to belong to a crip community. Such as this is, focusing on our communal investment— desiring disability—is paramount for my project that explores how crip communities are framed and figured. Insofar as the desire for disability is antagonistic to the normative desire to ignore, cure, or kill disability—a desire that floods and overwhelms normative geography—this is how crip communities
also unwork commonly-held understandings of disability, and re-work the ontologies, epistemologies, and geographies of disability.

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Understanding crip community in the way that I do—framed as a space of alterity, formed by seemingly spontaneous events that nonetheless require the work of enactment with unexpected others, bound together by the shared communal investment to dwell in and desire disability—requires me to explore the connection between crip community members, formations and investments… in a variety of their vicissitudes. What follows is how I imagine “different geographic stories” (Brand cited in McKittrick, 2006, p. x) of crip communities, other communities, and disability to unfold in this dissertation.

**Overview of Chapters**

This dissertation engages stories about being in disability and crip community, specifically attending to the meaning that is generated between storyteller and story-listener, in order to bring collective sense to a collective experience. The stories put forth in this dissertation do not together make a concerted, single story of community. Rather, these stories tell different stories, sometimes complicated stories, contradictory stories, incomplete stories, stories that productively unsettled my taken-for-granted understanding of community. Following this chapter, the next chapter engages some of
my stories of community and ends with a story from another person, Clare, who tells a story of his experience in community. Chapter two also engages a river story by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, which stories the relationship between her body and her environment. This chapter is very much animated by Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story, and engages other stories—mine and others—told throughout, to attend to the entangled cultural production of the environment and disability. Beginning with a framing of geographic spaces as “leaky containers” whose meaning always extend beyond themselves, I think through the ways that geography, specifically the “geographic containers” (Solnit, 2010) of slave ships, freak shows, and asylums, “normalizes and calibrates where, and therefore who, we are” (McKittrick, 2006, p. x). Using Puar’s (2011) framing of debility, while considering Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story, this chapter goes on to address the ways that the land—specifically as they are tied to environmental hazards—can impair us and may orient us to different understandings of the disabled body. This chapter, which opens up to different stories of difference, stories which potentially disrupt our disability politics, stories that emerge when we carefully and critically think through the relationship between disability and the environment, ends with a discussion of “blinded knowledge” (de Certeau, 1984) in order to think through a way to live together differently with and in difference.

My third chapter moves from the previous chapter’s interrogation of the interconnected normative geography of disabled and diaspora people and opens up a discussion about how we can be placed and understood differently—communally—in a way that does not necessarily transcend our normative geography but, instead, crips it. The stories I use in this chapter, predominately, are stories that were told to me in the
interviews. As my interviews were conversations between the participant and me where we shared stories about community with each other, this chapter also holds more of my communal stories, told and untold. This chapter begins with a discussion of how I use a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to attend to these stories and think about how the meaning of community is made between the storyteller, my participants, and the story-listener, me. I then move on to engage my interviews with one member of each of the following university disability-related groups: the Peer Mentorship Program tied to U of T’s Accessibility Services, U of T’s chapter of “Best Buddies”, a program that pairs a non-disabled university student with a disabled ‘buddy’ outside of the university tied to U of T’s volunteer program, and a disability rights student advocacy group housed at U of T. I orient towards these interviews as extending a “compelling invitation” (Dion, 1999) to think through how at the very moment we attempt to describe community and our experiences within it, we must also attempt to define, what ‘it’ is. Drawing on these interviews, this chapter explores how people feel a sense/“sensibility” of belongingness within these structured communities (Titchkosky, 2008). While all of my participants acknowledged common sense understandings of some version of ‘traditional’ (or more formally structured) communities, they all articulated another kind of community, one that is known through a feeling. What compelled me as a story-listener, which I dwell significantly on in this chapter, is how participants describe their experiences of community as uncanny, as they often told stories about being both drawn into and repelled by communities at U of T.

Chapter four takes up desire as a productive force (Butler, 1999; 2006; Munoz, 2009). This chapter continues to engage community stories told to me in interviews in
order to think through how feelings of belongingness are achieved and ways that we come together in community through a desire for disability and how this desire produces community. Compelled by the stories told to me in interviews, I think about how different communities desire disability differently, and, in so doing, desire a particular meaning of disability to be produced. I attempt to disrupt my own understanding that desiring disability always, necessarily, produces crip/ped space that is distinct from the normative terrain wherein disability is undesirable. I also wonder about the different community spaces, and different feeling generated in these spaces, that are produced through the different ways that we desire disability. Put differently, I attend to how the different ways that we desire disability produces different kinds of disability communities. Holding onto the ways that desire is productive, this chapter demonstrates the necessity of thinking about crip community as a ‘becoming;’ a becoming that is bound together by communal understandings and shared ways of desiring disability rather than shared embodiments or identities. The final chapter of my dissertation, chapter five, is animated by another of my stories of community and thinks through how crip communities, produced through desire can provide geographies of safety… if fleeting… and create ways of living together in, with, and for disability. This chapter thinks through how disability is made to mean in disabling futures wherein the disabled body is figured as the site of ‘no future,’ and how we might crip ideas of futurity as a way to keep on living. Along the way, and using my final story of crip community, I emphasize how the act of narrating—of translating an experience into a story—is a productive, meaning-making action.
I end this chapter as I began it, with a story. The story I end with is not mine, but, much like my story that began this chapter, this one describes an interaction of crip community on the sidewalk—a site of normative geography that this dissertation is particularly interested in. I choose to end this introductory chapter with this particular story as a way into my next chapter, which describes the normative terrain in which crip communities are enacted. This is a story by Clare, a prominent disability rights activist, disability studies scholar, and poet, taken from a chapter, “Flirting With You,” is loosely centred on a weekend in which Clare attended a protest with the disability rights activist group called Not Dead Yet. Not Dead Yet is a group who uses direct action to oppose the legalization of the killing of disabled people through euthanasia and other forms of assisted suicide. The group, “fifty crips and our non-disabled allies”, loudly protests the head of Hemlock Society USA Dr. Faye Girsh’s support of “mercy killings” (Clare, 1999, p.127).

You and I watch Sean, a six-year-old kid with cerebral palsy (CP) in his bright red power chair. He wears a “Crip Cool” baseball cap. His brother hitches rides on the

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16 “Not Dead Yet” is a radical disability rights organization out of the United States dedicated to opposing assisted suicide and the euthanasia movement through different forms of direct action. This group is a structured group that is open to anyone, “crips and our allies”, as Clare describes, who believes that a disabled life is a life worth living and that legalizing the medical killing (assisted suicide and euthanasia) of people considered to be terminally ill is a disability rights issue for it creates a “deadly double standard for people with severe disabilities, including both conditions that are labeled terminal and those that are not” (http://notdeadyetnewscommentary.blogspot.com/).

17 The Hemlock Society USA was a national right-to-die organization founded in Santa Monica, California in 1980. Its primary missions included providing information to dying persons and supporting legislation permitting physician-assisted suicide (http://hemlocksocietysandiego.org/)
back of his chair. His nondisabled father wears an ADAPT\textsuperscript{18} T-shirt and has trouble keeping up as Sean motors through the crowd of gimps. We both know that he could have been another Tracy Latimer, a twelve-year-old girl with severe cerebral palsy, killed by her father, who said he did it to end her unbearable suffering\textsuperscript{19}.

Something about how Sean moves—his wrists bent at odd angles, arms pulled tight against his body, tremors catching his head—feels so familiar to me. His CP and mine are so far apart, and yet in him I can see my own reflection—hands trembling, body slightly off center, right shoulder braced. You lean over and ask, “What would it be like to grow up like Sean in the middle of crip community?” I can almost hear all the stories rise untold around us. I say, joking, “Don’t push it. You’ll make me cry, which I don’t do often and never in public.”

-- Eli Clare, 1999, p. 128

Clare’s story describes experiencing a different story of difference play out and getting glimpses into how other stories of difference may play out at other times, in the midst of a culture in which it could so easily be told otherwise. Clare tells this story in a particular way, dwelling on specific details. From Clare’s description of Sean sporting a “Crip Cool” cap, it seems that at five years old, Sean is already acquainted with and seemingly acceptant of a crip identity. We gather that he is familiar and involved with

\textsuperscript{18}ADAPT is a national grass-roots community in the United States that organizes disability rights activists to engage in nonviolent direct action, including civil disobedience, to assure the civil and human rights of people with disabilities to live in freedom (http://www.adapt.org/)

\textsuperscript{19}In his chapter, Coming Face-to-Face with Suffering, in his book The Difference that Disability Makes (2002), Michalko (2002) interrogates the details of Robert Latimar’s trial, paying particular attention to Robert and his wife Laura’s testimony, suggesting that Robert killed his daughter Tracy in order to terminate his own suffering, not hers (pp. 103-111). Much of the Canadian public believed that Robert behaved ‘mercifully’ when he killed his daughter and believed that life imprisonment with no parole for a minimum of ten years was cruel and unusual punishment (Michalko, 2002, p. 105). For my brief analysis of the Latimer case I am drawing largely on Michalko’s chapter.
radical possibilities for disability rights promotion done through direct action in which crips and their allies fiercely advocate for the right to disabled life. Even when he is not moving with a crowd of folks in the crip community, we can easily assume that Sean is surrounded by a family who understands disability as a life worth living from Clare’s description of his brother hitching a ride on the back of his power chair and his detail of his father wearing an ADAPT t-shirt.

Clare’s story of watching Sean also tells us that things could easily be otherwise. To begin with, that a disabled five-year-old’s presence at a disability rights protest was remarkable, and remarkable enough to recount in a fair amount of detail in the middle of a short chapter, tells us that this event appeared to Clare as extraordinary. What does appear ordinary, albeit extraordinary in its ordinariness (Titchkosky, 2007), is that a disabled child would be excluded from participating in social life and undesired by his family…and violently so. Clare (1999) tells us that he and his protest partner knew that Sean “could have been another Tracy Latimer” (p. 128), referring to the infamous case in Saskatchewan in which a father, Robert Latimer, killed his twelve-year old daughter, Tracy, who had what the Canadian press referred to as “severe” CP. Robert Latimer claimed that he killed his daughter to put her out of her suffering, a decision supported by his wife, Laura. The Canadian public, who thought that this punishment did not fit the crime, responded to Robert’s sentence of life imprisonment with outrage (Frazee, 2013). This public outrage was indicative of a cultural intolerance not with killing disabled life, but, rather, with punishing this act— exactly the kind of cultural intolerance of disabled life that this “Not Yet Dead” rally is protesting.
Clare’s narrative juxtaposes Sean’s involvement in the “Not Yet Dead” protest with Tracy Latimer, whose CP led her to be killed by her father. There is also distance and closeness between Clare and Sean. Clare writes that there is something that feels so familiar to him about the way that Sean moves, and yet their CPs feels so far apart (1999, p. 128). Throughout this chapter, Clare (1999) juxtaposes his experience in crip community at the protest flirting with a “fat, queer, radical crip femme” with his experiences growing up as a child with CP, twenty years earlier (p. 127). In his childhood, as he describes further along in this chapter, Clare (1999) stayed as far away as possible from other disabled kids and walked with shame to the other side of the playground to join the other ‘special ed’ kids for gym class (pp. 130-132). Fifteen years after avoiding and fighting with the other disabled kids in his town, Clare (1999) writes, “I slowly made my first friend with another crip, slowly finding my way into disability community. I’ve come to appreciate the tremoring arm, the gnarly back, the halting speech, the thin legs, the milky eyes, the language that lives not in tongues but in hands” (pp. 133-134).

Sean’s body—an off-centred body of CP with his arms curled in—feels familiar to Clare and yet the experience of being young, disabled and struggling for rights within a community, it seems, feels so unfamiliar to Clare, who spent his childhood individually struggling against the stigma of disability and the loneliness, isolation and hatred that it brought. Clare’s storying of Sean’s way of moving through the world in his body and his described ‘home’ at the Not Dead Yet rally feels similarly familiar and unfamiliar to me. Reading Clare’s story, I can easily feel my arms curling inwards; I cannot easily feel experiencing a home in a community expanding outwards as a child.
This narrative ends with Clare’s femme comrade asking him, “What would it be like to grow up like Sean in the middle of crip community?” (Clare, 1999, p. 128); a question that holds the potential to provoke tears from Clare who does not often cry and never in public. This question makes sense framed as a ‘what if question’ by Clare’s comrade who he has just met, or at least it seems this way from the framing of this story, for the sensibility of the ableist culture we live in makes the possibility of growing up, or even living in a crip community, appear as unlikely…even impossible…even in the midst of a situation in which this possibility materializes through Sean.

At the end of Clare’s (1999) story, he writes, “I feel connected [at the Not Dead Yet rally,] but when I go home tonight, the action done, these rabble-rousing gimps headed back to their homes all over the country, I’ll slip back into the nondisabled world…” (p. 135). “…[O]nce I am in the world,” Clare (1999) continues,

I often feel alone, different, the only one. I am reminded over and over that I move more slowly, talk more slowly, carry myself in ways different from everyone around me, and reminded that difference is not valued, but mocked, not respected but used as leverage to give certain groups power and to marginalize others. Alone, different, the only one. p. 135.

Sean seems to live a happy life, and I hope that he does. But I am sure that even Sean misses this community; Sean’s community slips when he has to slip back into the ableist world after a weekend of rabble-rousing. And perhaps the memory of being at this rally in the midst of a community fighting for the right for disabled life warms him when he misses community as he power-wheels through other, more normative, geographic spaces in which his disability means something else; where he is reminded that he is
different and his difference is not valued but mocked (Clare, 1999, p. 135). I have memories of being in playgrounds where my CP was understood to be laughable, regrettable, ugly, pitiable, and messy and if Sean has these experiences too, I hope with pessimism, which is perhaps the only way to hope in an ableist, racist world, that these community stories and the meanings they make of disability rub these playground stories. This rub, hopefully, makes the experience of negotiating normative spaces attached to normative meanings of disability a little bit “warmer” (Bauman, 2000).

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Stuart Hall (1997) asserts that thinking about culture is absolutely central for crafting out political identities, for culture, as he says, “constitutes the terrain for producing identity, for producing social subjects” (p. 291). The terrain of normative culture is flooded with ableist logic, or as Titchkosky (2007) writes, a “sensibility” under which ableism— an ideology informing ableist acts, treatment, justification, and so on— makes sense. In our culture, the extraordinary act of killing a disabled child makes “ordinary” sense; punishing this act as a crime does not. Growing up disabled and trying to stay far away from other disabled kids seems possible, even likely; growing up crip in the middle of a crip community seems impossible. Telling stories of how disability is enacted within the normative terrain in accordance with ableist logic may be painful and these are not necessarily the stories I want to tell. However, following Hall, we must first attend to the normative terrain— sidewalks, cafes, university classrooms and the like— to
understand how disability is enacted under an ableist ideology in order to consider how different stories of difference—disability, in this dissertation—emerge.
Chapter Two: Mapping Difference

If this is your land, where are your stories?

-- Chamberlin, 2007, p. 1

When I was a little girl growing up in the rust belt town of Worcester, Massachusetts, the river that ran through my hometown was the Blackstone, only it was more of a myth than a river. It was a river no one had ever seen. The people who had come to Worcester to work in the shoe and textile factories, leather and electronics, they knew the Blackstone because it turned the wheels of the mills that made the money for the bosses.

But in the seventies the city fathers put the Blackstone in a culvert, and it became a myth, a myth of a pretty woman who had become a monster. The Blackstone had been put to work like our working-class women's bodies, worked and worked to make someone else money, til she was worked to rags, thin and worn through, discarded when her body was too dirty for anyone to want to touch.

Entombed in cement, she slowly filled up with poison from all those dyes, all that cement, all those computer chips rinsed with acid. She flowed under the city, and we never saw her sweet hips or her cum rushing green and willowy through our beautiful rust belt empty lot paradise. All we knew was she was fucked up and hidden, locked up someplace where no one would touch her.

In 1983, my mother could recite the thirty-three cancer-causing compounds in Worcester water. The city fathers insisted that the water was fresh and clean, but all we knew is you could smell the chlorine thicker than a pool before you turned on the tap. Drinking it, you could feel your cells shrivel, and you knew you were forever fucked, a dirty river girl drinking dirty Worcester water that would make you too sick to even make it out. Working class folks and lower middle class ones like my mama bought bottled water, 29
cents a gallon, and we drank and drank, hoping we would survive not forever scarred.

It worked and it didn't. There's only so much bottled water can do. When the wind was blowing from Norton's plant, you wanted to puke at my school, 500 yards away. Every year, a teacher's hair fell out with alopecia, and another teacher got breast or colon cancer. I was 19 when my mother was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer, tentacles touching her uterus and intestines, blooming like algae in a polluted lake. The first girl I kissed grew up in Leominster, where there was a little uranium leak in the 80s. She found out she had cervical and uterine cancer at 28, when she went for her first pap smear in ten uninsured years.

And through it all, the fingers of mothers and fathers, touching and whiskey and silence and rage, passed down. All our bodies sick and fucked for no good reason. Just some dumb stories we made up that no one wanted to hear.²⁰

- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2009

In my previous chapter I emphasized my desire to ‘crip’, that is, to open up with desire for the way that disability disrupts and through this cripping, imagine new worlds, new ways of being together in community. By cripping, McRuer’s (2014)²¹ use of the word ‘crip’ to mean to, “expose ways in which bodies, minds, and impairments that should be at the absolute centre of a space or issue or discussion get ‘purged’ (Tongson) from that space or issue or discussion…” I explained how this dissertation aims to crip community by attending to the many ways disability is storied, particularly stories about how disability brings us together in community. Before attending to the ways that crip

²⁰ This is a transcript copied directly from a youtube video documenting Piepzna-Samaeasinha’s 2009 performance with Sins Invalid. Retrieved January 8, 2012 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkSG5NKRALs.
²¹ Updated from his 2001 book Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability.
communities can give us a “different sense of place” (Brand, 1999), if only in fleeting
and unsteady ways, as demonstrated by Clare’s story that ended chapter one, I want to
first think through the ways that disability is made meaningful in normative spaces
through ableist logic that floods them. In this chapter, I think about how meanings of
bodies and land are produced at once in entangled ways. I am provoked by disability
studies scholar Alison Kafer who, in her book Feminist, Queer, Crip (2013), urges us to
think the relationship between disability and the environment afresh. Kafer makes clear
that important conversations about the connection between disability and the environment
are limited by the ways that some disability studies only engages this connection through
the social model’s claim that the built environment disables people. These conversations
are also limited by the ways environmental studies articulate the many ways that
environmental hazards cause ‘devastating’ and ‘abnormal’ impairment, aberrant
embodied changes, and flaws (Kafer, 2013, pp. 129; 157). Kafer (2013) suggests that the
connection between disability and the environment is much more nuanced than the
conversation in either discipline represents, nuances that her work is attending to, and she
asks us to think about this relationship with greater complexity (p. 129). Following
Kafer’s (2013) suggestion, this chapter attends to cultural constructions and deployments
of “nature,” “natural,” and “the environment” in the same way as we think about the
cultural production of disability and impairment (p. 129). She engages William Cronon,
who writes, “‘Nature’ is not nearly as natural as it seems” (cited in Kafer, 2014, p. 131)
with,

On the contrary, our encounters with wilderness are historically and culturally
grounded; our ideas about what constitutes ‘nature’ or ‘the natural’ or ‘the
unnatural’ are completely bound up in our specific histories and cultural assumptions. We need to interrogate these assumptions. 2013, p. 131. I follow Kafer’s (2013) urgings and think about the connection between disability and the environment, troubling historical and cultural assumptions, in a way that thinks carefully about the entangled cultural production of both (p. 131).

This chapter will carry on from my last chapter’s use of stories to explore how crip communities can “unwork” (Brand, 1999, p. 5) and rework meanings of disability, community, and also normative geography (Walcott, 2001; McKittrick, 2006). I engage the critical connections between disability and geography by way of getting productively entangled in a few knotted relations. I begin framing geographic as “leaky containers” (Solnit, 2010, p. vii) whose meanings always extend beyond themselves. This framing allows me to demonstrate how the (ableist, racist, colonialist) meanings that spaces are infused with contribute to the meanings made of the people within these spaces. My next section looks at entangled ways that racialized and disabled people are both hidden away and put on display, attending to how these geographic places, “normalize and calibrate where, and therefore who, we are” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi). Animated by Piepzna-Samarasinha’s (2009) story of the river, I then consider how the ways that the land—specifically environmental hazards—can impair us can land us in a different understanding of the disabled body and living disabled. The next section takes up Puar’s (2010) articulation of “debility,” that is, the “cost of getting better,” or perhaps, more precisely, the debt incurred from attempting to recover from “neoliberal injury” or environmental injury caused by environmental racism (pp. 149-151). I follow up this discussion with the ‘promise of community,’ which is achieved by what I refer to as
“blinded knowledge,” taking from de Certeau’s (1984) narration of this concept. In my concluding section, I argue that orienting to community through the perspective of blinded knowledge, rather than the fictitious understanding of the whole of community obtained by a “scopic view” could allow us to attend to different stories of difference not as disruptive to our understanding of crip community, but, rather, as stories that we already live with, stories that already shape ‘us.’ These stories, that emerged when I began to think carefully about the ways that bodies and the environment are connected, give rise to a “different sense of place” (Brand, 1999) in crip community.

At the outset of this chapter, I want to make clear that interrogating the connection between disability and geography is not new work. This terrain has been critically interrogated within both the disciplines of disability studies (largely through social model analyses) and human geography (though not extensively). Like McKittrick, my analysis is not carried out through the disciplinary perspective of human geography, but it is worth mentioning how this discipline takes up the disability/geography connection. Bringing together human geography and disability studies, Brendan Gleeson’s work in his book, Geographies of Disability, exemplifies the social model’s want, as it is described by Kafer. Gleeson (1999) thinks through the relationship between space and disability in such a way that, “explores how social and spatial processes can be used to disable rather than enable people with physical impairments” (p. 1). Gleeson’s (1999) work addresses what he identifies as a research gap in the discipline of human geography, which, for him, is important because of the rising number of disabled people (pp. 1-3). For Gleeson, disability matters are spatial matters. He believes that the elimination of spatial practices and knowledges that oppress disabled people requires us
to first explain why and how they occur (which is the topic of his book (1999, p. 3).

While I appreciate Gleeson’s project, in the way that I appreciate any scholarly work that engages disability rights and disability justice, I am thinking about disability matters as spatial matters through a different orientation. While I agree that “spatial practices and knowledges,” oppress disabled people, I do not believe that such practices and knowledges could ever be “eliminated” (Gleeson, 1999, p. 3). It seems to me, as I explore throughout this chapter and this dissertation as a whole, that there is too much cultural investment bound up in the production of disabled people as ‘abnormal,’ which is, in part, achieved through our geographic placement, for disability oppression (ableism) to ever be eliminated completely. Eliminating, or more accurately, interrogating, the geographic production of disabled people as excludable types requires more than bureaucratic changes (Titchkosky, 2008). My interrogation of the connection between disability and geography is more in line with McKittrick’s (2006) claim that geography is in need of philosophical attention (p. ix) and Kafer’s (2013) assertion that the connection between disability and the environment is much more complex than social model arguments make it out to be (p. 129). Paying attention to the entangled material and discursive production of disability, which is a complicated production as this chapter demonstrates, is important to my work on exploring how crip communities become enacted. Crip communities are enacted on normative terrain, for even though community can, and sometimes does, transform this terrain, it cannot transcend it. So, then, I must begin the work of how crip communities are enacted and, through their enactment give us a “different sense of [normative] space,” (Brand, 1999) by attending to how disabled bodies are made to mean within normative geography.
Storying the Land

Stories and the land are closely connected. The land we are placed on, contained within, or place ourselves on is filled with stories. We live in the midst of other people’s stories about the land, and the understandings of the land that these stories produce contribute to the meaning made of us. We also create and tell our own stories about the land. Stories help us forge a connection to the land. Stories help us find our place; through them we make the land familiar to ourselves. Geographer and philosopher Rebecca Solnit (2010) articulates geography as “leaky spatial containers” in a way similar to McKittrick’s configuration of material and discursive geographic containers, described in chapter one (p. vii). Solnit (2010) writes,

Places are leaky containers. […] They always refer beyond themselves, whether island or mainland, and can be imagined in various scales, from the drama of a back alley to transcontinental geopolitical forces and global climate. What we call places are stable locations with unstable converging forces that cannot be delineated either by fences on the ground or by boundaries in the imagination—or by the perimeter of a map. Something is always coming from elsewhere, whether it’s wind, water, immigrants (p. vii).

We create maps with our stories, we create personal cartographies. To this, Solnit (2010) writes, “A heartbreak […] can be mapped out in six blocks, with bars and slammed doors and a bedroom” (p. vii).
We all have geographic stories. Through stories we attach meaning onto geographic spaces. Stories give geography shape. My home cityscape is full of my stories. I spent a summer on a patch of sidewalk in Kensington Market, Toronto behind a crepe stand; beyond the window that overlooks this patch is where I once fell in love; in the produce store on the adjacent corner is where my best friend got her heart broken, over and over again; the owner of the shop next to this patch of sidewalk refers to me by a different name; here my name is not Eliza but Lucy. And there are many more stories housed on this sidewalk patch. All of these private, public, mundane, dramatic, life changing, and insignificant stories are crammed into half a city block, this leaky geographic container. And when I walk down this block I sometimes feel tugged in all sorts of different emotional directions. Other times I am simply thinking of my grocery list. And together, these stories shape the meaning of this part of my city. It is not as though this city block is shaped by one story. Even a story of falling in love is not strong enough to overwhelmingly shape this geography; sometimes the meaning of this space does not change the meaning of this geography into anyplace other than a place to buy bananas. And these stories—these “converging forces”—attach me to the particular, relatively stable, place of the sidewalk in unstable ways. This sidewalk can easily be storied to mean heartbreak, new love, and bananas at the same time. Stories give meanings to spaces, but these meanings certainly are not static… stories give us meaning and value to places we call home; they hold us together at the same time as they keep us apart.

The land holds many stories, even conflicting stories. Some stories hold more power than others, usually determined by the relations of ruling between the storytellers.
Recall King’s telling of two origin stories of the land, which I recounted in chapter one. These two stories, a Judeo-Christian creation story and a Native origin story, both story the land—specifically, they narrate the origin of the earth—differently. Although, as King (2001) says, one story, the Judeo-Christian story, has “more place and purchase” than the other story, the story of Charm, amidst the thunder of Christian monologues, we may find that we can live within or between these two stories, and many more, which story the same land in different ways (p. 21).

Places always refer beyond themselves (Solnit, 2010). In Piepzna- Samarasinha’s story of the Blackstone, which opened this chapter, the river referred beyond itself; the river itself was a leaky container. Once upon a time, this river was what attracted people to Worcester, Massachusetts. This is the river that turned the mills at the factories (Piepzna- Samarasinha, para 1, 2009). And then this river turned, it turned from a pretty lady into a monster when it was put to work to make someone else money (Piepzna-Samarasinha, para 2, 2009). The Blackstone turned into a monster when its water turned dirty, turned monstrous by the very thing that turned this river into a pretty lady—the factories. The water in the Blackstone is dirty but through these stories the Blackstone becomes more than just a river who happens to be dirty… nothing in the environment, built or otherwise, is ever ‘just natural’ (Kafer, 2013). This river is made polluted by its close proximity to the factories, factories characteristic of poor, working class industrial towns. This is a river whose dirty, polluted water was described as ‘fresh’ by the city fathers who encourage the people in the town to drink its water (Piepzna-Samarasinha, para 4, 2009). This is part of the story.
The Blackstone is “more of a myth than a river” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2009).

This particular story figures the Blackstone as a leaky geographic container; its meaning stretching beyond itself, splashing over the riverbanks. We know this land through Piepzna-Samarasinha’s (2009) story, a story that touches her, touches her mother, touches her school teacher, touches the city fathers, touches factory workers, it even reaches out and touches another river that has touched her first girlfriend. Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story maps out a personal cartography of this river and its surrounding land. There are other stories of the Blackstone, of course. However, I know this river through Piepzna-Samarasinha’s storying of it. Chamberlin (2007) writes, “[Stories] are ceremonies of belief as much as they are chronicles of events, even stories that claim to be absolutely true” (p. 2). He continues, “Stories give us ways to believe. Stories also give us things to believe” (Chamberlin, 2007, pp. 2-3). We can believe that the Blackstone turned from a pretty lady, producing economy, into a monster, producing what Puar (2011) refers to as “debility.” We might also believe that the meaning that Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story gives the land is not singular. Perhaps the ‘turn’ from a pretty lady into a monster is not so straightforward. The river might not have simply and irreversibly turned from a productive force into a destructive one; this river might flow both ways. Out of this story we can find the possibility that the production of impairment is destructive and productive at once. Provoked by the opening story, this chapter, particularly the later half, demonstrates how as much as the land can debilitate us, taking away life as we know it, impairment, an alternative to death, can make life, a new kind of life with disability.
Tangled Knots of Humanness and Geography

I don’t want no fucking country, here
or there and all the way back, I don’t like it, none of it,
easy as that.

- Dionne Brand, 1997

Reflecting on the stanza above, McKittrick (2006) claims that Brand’s decision to give up on land—to want no country—“disclose[s] that geography is always human, and that humanness is always tied to the geographic” (p. ix). This stanza also reveals that one’s relationship to the land is not stable or nonnegotiable. McKittrick (2006) suggests, “geography, the material world, is infused with sensations and distinct ways of knowing” (ix), and therefore, it must follow, that the way we ‘know’ certain geographies has much to do with the way we understand the bodies that occupy or are contained with these spaces.

Normative geography—one’s ‘normal’ or ‘naturalized’ place of belonging within the nation-state—makes up the meaning of people placed in or contained by these physical and imaginative spaces. The meaning made of people contributes to the creation and the sustained imaginary of what a nation-state is (Anderson, 1982). Of course, the reverse is also true; the way we come to ‘know’ certain bodies has much to do with how we understand the geographic spaces they occupy. Geographies are constructed out of meaning and infused with meaning; historical, political, colonial, and also the ontological and epistemological meaning of their occupants. However securely bound the connection between the meanings made of space and the people who occupy space seem to be, we
must remember that, as McKittrick (2006) also tells us, “Geography is not, however, secure and unwavering; we produce space, we produce its meaning, and we work very hard to make geography what it is” (p. xi). Thinking with McKittrick’s (2006) engagement with Brand’s work presented in the stanza at the beginning of this section, “If we trust Brand’s insights, she also knows that these rules are alterable and there exists a terrain through which different geographic stories are and can be told” (p. x). In Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story, and in tune with Kafer’s call, we can understand that the town of Worcester, Mass. is not ‘naturally’ designated as a poor, industrial town; it is indeed produced as such. And this cultural and geopolitical production involves more than just an industry and a river with dirty water; the people in this town produce this land as disposable. This town, in turn, produces its people as undesirable, disposable citizens. But, indeed, different geographic stories about this land and its people can be told and, through them, new meaning of bodies of flesh and/within bodies of land can emerge (McKittrick, 2006, p x).

In many analogous, overlapping, and entangled ways, geography contributes to the meaning of race and disability and racialized, disabled, and racialized disabled people contribute to the meaning of certain spaces as well. Beginning with the assertion that “human geography is in need of philosophical attention,” McKittrick (2006) discusses black geography as one of containment (pp. ix-x). As McKittrick (2006) writes, “black matters are spatial matters” (p. xii). She continues, “While we all produce, know, and negotiate space—albeit on different terms—geographies in the diaspora are accentuated by racist paradigms of the past.” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xii). McKittrick discusses many geographic sites connected to the transatlantic slave trade (15th – 16th century) throughout

McKittrick (2006) writes that,

The ships of the transatlantic slavery moving across the middle passage, transporting humans for free labour into ‘newer worlds’ do not only site modern technological progression, which materially moves diasporic subjects through space, that is, on and across the ocean, and on and across landmasses such as Canada, the United States, the Caribbean; these vessels also expose a very meaningful struggle for freedom in place. p. x.

McKittrick (2006) pays philosophical attention to the geographies of the transatlantic slave trade, which include slave ships, slave quarters, plantation grounds, a tiny garret in a slave master’s house, and the slave auction block, because, as she puts it, “If space and place appear to be secure and unwavering, than what space and place make possible, outside and beyond tangible stabilities, and from the perspective of struggle, can potentially fade away (p. xi). And concealment and containment, like all geographies, are not natural processes… we organize where differentiation occurs (McKittrick, 2006, pp. xi-xii). The slave ships of the transatlantic slave trade provide an example of how we organize where racial difference occurs and how such geographic placement calibrates the meaning of black humanity. These ships worked as a geographic vessel that both imprisoned black bodies and transported them to the Americas where they were further enslaved and treated as human commodities to work in conditions without pay, rights, or freedoms, conditions which, in combination with the slave ship itself, made them slaves (McKittrick, 2006). As much as this geographic placement normalized and calibrated black humanity—those contained in the slave ship, on plantations, and black people as a
collective in this historical moment—the meaning this geography was infused with was not unwavering (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi). This material and ideological containment of black subjects—economic subjects inside and often bound to the ship’s walls—also contribute to the formation of an oppositional geography: the ship as a location of black subjectivity and human terror, black resistance, and in some cases, black possession (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi).

Olaudah Equiano, who experienced being bound within a slave ship, writes about how black bodies were captured and loaded into the barrels of slave ships in much the same way as they would carry cargo (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi). Equiano describes the slave ship as “a location of suppression upheld, in part, by black grief and death” (in McKittrick, 2006, p. xi). Black people were laid side by side in shackles in low hanging containers in the ship in an ultimate and utterly violent act of objectification. In this way the geography of the slave ship “contained and regulated,” as it hid, black humanity, naturalizing the understanding that those inside, bound by the walls, were neither “seeable (sic) nor liberated subjects” (McKittrick, 2006, p. x). As Equiano, as cited in McKittrick (2006) notes, “[The slave ship] hid and suffocated human cargo and curtailed resistances” (p. xi). Speaking to the material and discursive convergence engendered in how the geographic site of the slave ship regulated cultural understandings of those contained within it, McKittrick (2006) writes,

The idea that space ‘just is,’ and that space and place are merely containers of human complexities and social relations, is terribly seductive: that which “just is” not only anchors our selfhood and feet
to the ground, it seemingly calibrates and normalizes where, and
therefore who, we are. (p. xi)

It was not that these black bodies were biologically suited to work in such conditions; these people did not have a ‘natural’ place in slavery. These bodies were produced as such, made into enslaved people…and this was, in part, geographic work. At the same time as slave ships, and later slave quarters and slave plantations, contained slaves, these geographic spaces made slaves. We are culturally invested in disregarding the ways that bodies were and still are produced as slaves or are produced as in-need-of-segregation in various other ways. It is easier to treat bodies as workers and not people when the denial of their humanity is naturalized… in part, by the spaces they are in. The striking example of the slave ship as a geographic site of black geography powerfully reveals just how tightly humanness and geography are entangled. Treating humans as cargo, in much the same way as rice or tea would be treated, and, further, enslaving them as laborers is abhorrent… unthinkable. So, then, in order for the practice of enslaving people as it occurred, and still occurs, requires an understanding of people as not people. And such calibration occurs in and with geography. We understand black people not as enslaved people but instead as slaves (non-people) because of their geographic placement and the way that they are contained in slave ships and plantations, which work to create, sustain, and perpetuate racist and colonial logics. If they were not slaves, we manage to conclude, they would not be in geographies of slavery. Because they are enslaved—even though the act of enslaving people requires that they be violently contained in such places and denied freedom and autonomy over deciding where they are placed – we understand these people as slaves (non-people) and therefore, their abhorrent treatment is justified.
This is one of the ways that we make sense of colonial violence. And this work, this production of non-humanness is, in part, geographic work.

Following McKittrick’s (2006) work, disability matters are spatial matters, too (p. xii). The production of the cultural meaning of disability is also, in part, strongly connected to the geographic spaces that contain and displayed disabled bodies, both historically and contemporarily. In his text *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault (1964) provides a genealogy of the many ways that bodies of deviance, specifically mad bodies, were geographically positioned in, “the margins of the community, the gates of cities”, describing these, “stretched wastelands” as geographies of “non-human” (p. 3). In his text, Foucault (1964) traces out the evolution of new forms of, “incarceration of disease, another grimace of terror, and renowned rites of purification and exclusion,” (p. 3) which extended throughout the fourteenth to seventeenth century in Europe, the same historical moment McKittrick is engaging in her text. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Europe, specifically France, Germany, and England, lazar houses contained bodies of/with leprosy, which, in England alone, contained a million and a half people (Foucault, 1964, p. 4). In the sixteenth century, when the numbers of people with leprosy were significantly lower, these bodies were transported to hospitals and other welfare establishments (Foucault, 1964, p. 4). By the mid-sixteenth century, when leprosy no longer posed an immediate threat to public health and the social fabric of Europe; “lepers” had (almost) disappeared from the social landscape and the social imagination, although their structures—geographic symbols of illness and madness, such as lazar houses—remained (Foucault, 1964, p. 4). Around the turn of the fifteenth century, a new geography of deviancy emerged in the ship of fools, “a strange drunken boat” (Foucault,
This topological symbol of insanity materially contained disabled bodies and bodies classified as mad and the meaning of disability, madness, and illness (Foucault, 1964). This geographic container, ships which contained “insane cargo,” circulated the rivers and seas throughout fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe at the same time as slave ships were transporting black bodies as cargo on the middle passage (Foucault, 1964, p. 8). Authorities would violently gather up bodies classified as mad and hand them over to boatmen who would contain them in these ‘ships of fools’ (Foucault, 1964, p. 8). These ships would carry these bodies around the rivers and seas of Europe, aimlessly transporting them from town to town (Foucault, 1964, p. 8). Sometimes the people on the ships would be let off in a town where they were banished to the countryside to wander (Foucault, 1964, p. 8).

The geographic symbol, which was also a physical structure, of the ship of fools, served the same cultural function of simultaneously hiding and displaying deviant bodies as was achieved by slave ships. Reading McKittrick’s (2006, p. xi-xii) work with Foucault, we can understand ships of fools as contributing to the organization of where differentiation occurs. It was not that mad people, or people classified as mad, were “naturally” non-human; they were made into non-humans, in part, by their geographic placement on these ships. In his analysis of the ships of fools, Foucault articulates the function of the water that carried these ships, an articulation that can be extended to the slave ships and the water of the middle passage. Water, Foucault (1964) writes, “carries off, but it does more: it purifies” (p. 11). Foucault (1964) also writes:

Confined on the ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is to a river with its thousand arms and a sea with its thousand roads, to the great
uncertainty external to everything. He is a prisoner in the midst of what is
the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite of crossroads.
He is the Passenger *par excellence*: that is, the prisoner of the passage.
And the land he will come to is unknown—as is, once he disembarks, the
land from which he comes. He has his truth and he has his homeland only
in the fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him.
(p. 11.)

McKittrick’s (2006) work unpacks how the transformation of people into non-people
happened, in part, in the slave ship routes across the middle passage (racism, colonialism
and colonial logic, and capitalism also made possible the transformation of meaning).
Indeed, as Foucault (1964) describes of “madmen,” once black people disembarked from
the slave ship, they entered into a process of “unbelonging,” (Brand, 2012, p. 5)
belonging neither to the land they have left nor to the land to which they arrive; they
become a “prisoner of the passage” (Foucault, 1964, p. 11). The statelessness of the
bodies contained on slave ships and ships of fools contributed to their calibration as non-
human.

There are some obvious and significant differences between the slave ships and
the ships of fools of the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Both ships enslaved bodies of
difference and calibrated their meanings as non-human, which allowed for them to be
treated as non-humans in violent ways. However, while slave ships transported black
bodies over the middle passage, enslaving them in slave quarters and on plantations in
North America to work, to propel emerging global capitalism, ships of fools transported
their “insane cargo” (Foucault, 1964, p. 8), understood as impediments to capitalism,
aimlessly throughout Europe, with no fixed destination, but with social purpose. Both black bodies and mad bodies were made into stateless bodies, uncared for by any state, through their geographic placement on the topological symbol of specific kinds of ships, which, through processes of containing and displaying bodies of difference, organizing where differentiation occurred, calibrated and normalized where, and therefore who, these people were (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi-xii).

Garland-Thomson (2002) writes, “The history of disabled people in the Western world is, in part, the history of being on display, of being visually conspicuous while politically and socially erased” (p. 56). David A. Gerber’s (1996) exploration of the freak show tells us that, “The display of people with physical anomalies has ancient roots” (p. 43). During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the same historical period when bodies of difference were contained on slave ships and ships of fools, many European royal courts employed disabled people as a form of entertainment (Gerber, 1996, p. 43). At the same time as disabled people were put on display in private spaces, peasants would often display disabled family members in public spaces while they were asking for money (Gerber, 1996, p. 43).

The display of disabled people for profit was individual and disconnected until the 1850s when for-profit freak shows entered into the American cultural landscape, a cultural practice which remained strong until the 1980s (Gerber, 1996, p. 43). These nineteenth and twentieth century freak shows took the form of an independent act or a sideshow to a circus and emerged as a response to a growing market for amusement, which corresponded loosely with the rise of urban economic growth (Gerber, 1996, p. 43). Freak shows remained a popular phenomenon which displayed disabled bodies until
the rise of the charity model in the mid-twentieth century, which corresponded with the rise of deinstitutionalization movement\textsuperscript{22} in the 1960s and the emergence of the disability rights movement in the 1970s and 1980s, which demanded that disability rights were human rights. In the 1980s there remained only a small number of freak shows—less than five—that featured disabled people and the number of freak shows in general had dwindled (Gerber, 1996, p. 43). This is not to suggest that the exhibition of disabled bodies ended with the termination of freak shows\textsuperscript{23}. The charity model of disability, which emerged in the 1960s and carries on today, readily displays disabled bodies for profit, the \textit{Jerry Lewis Telethon} being a popular example. The way that the charity model displayed disabled people invoked what disability historian Paul Longmore (1999) refers to as “the ritual of donation, conspicuous cultural ritual where the ‘economically able’ garishly donate in public venues to help disabled people and bolster their own celebrity” (p. 3).

In his article, “Gaping, Gawking, Staring”, Clare speaks to the cultural practice of putting bodies of difference on display in freak shows. Of this history, Clare (2003) writes,

\textsuperscript{22} The North American deinstitutionalization provoked the widespread closure of asylums and other institutions (custodial geographies) that contained disabled people, such as sheltered workshops. There are many ‘origin stories’ for what initiated this change. According to some, this movement was initiated by growing public awareness through news reports of the poor living conditions, including overcrowding, lack of hygiene, starvation, and other forms of ill-treatment and abuses of inmates as well as funding cuts as a result of wartime austerity (Reaume, 2009). Other accounts cite the emergence of effective anti-psychotic drugs as provoking this movement (Scull, 1972, p. 174). Deinstitutionalization has also been attributed to the political organizing by inmates themselves as the genesis of the deinstitutionalization movement. Hunt et al argue that such uprising was a productive spin off of the civil rights movement (Hunt, 2005). Others, still, link deinstitutionalization to the rise of global capitalism. Andrew Scull (1976) argues that the primary factor behind what he calls ‘decarceration’ was a drive to control the soaring costs of incarceration, (p. 174), another example of how, through neoliberalism, the cost of care is downloaded from the state to the individual (Owen & Parker Harris, 2012).

\textsuperscript{23} Practices of putting anomalous bodies on display for entertainment and profit are not only historical. One only needs to turn on the television to witness contemporary versions of freak show in such TLC television shows as \textit{Little People, Big World, Little Couple, Hoarding}, and \textit{My Crazy Obsession}. 
I come from peoples who have a long history of being onstage—freaks and drag queens, court jesters and scientific experiments. Sometimes we work for money and are proud. Other times we’re just desperate. We’ve posed for anthropologists and cringed in front of doctors, jumped through hoops and answered the same questions over and over, performed the greatest spectacles and thumbed our noses and the shadows we call normal.

p. 257.

Clare’s passage demonstrates how disability matters are spatial matters in the way that he speaks to the historical ways that disabled people, as well as the understanding of our humanity, have been contained in display and on display at once (McKittrick, 2006, p. xii). The nineteenth century practice of containing disabled bodies in freak shows occurred well after the transatlantic slave trade contained black bodies in slave ships and slave quarters, which occurred largely in the fifteenth and sixteenth century and formally lasted up until the civil rights movement (1954-1968). However, the geographic work of the freak show, which normalized where disabled people were, thereby calibrating who they were, bares a resemblance to the geographic placement and treatment of racialized people within the transatlantic slave trade (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi). Similar to the geography of the slave ship and slave quarters, Clare’s passage reveals how the cultural meaning we assign to the terrain of freak show stages and freak show living quarters is also alterable (McKittrick, 2006, p. x). Although the spatial meaning of black people in slave quarters and then, later, disabled people in freak shows may calibrate their resistances as deviancy, or, indeed, pathologized as “dрапетомания”24, these people did

24 In his chapter, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,” Douglas Baynton (2001) addresses the convergences of the historical meaning made of racialized and disabled people in
resist (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi; Baynton, 2001, p. 38). Drawing on Clare’s (2003) words, “sometimes we work for money and are proud” (p. 257). I do not mean to deny the violence of this containment and the way these bodies of difference are objectified in this display for profit, nor do I mean to suggest that disabled people who worked in freak shows always gained a profit. I acknowledge that within such recognition, efforts should be made to, “understand both the nature of choice [of disabled people to perform in freak shows] and the ways in which choice ultimately may or may not be said to inform acts of uncoerced consent” (Gerber, 1996, p. 40). We need to think critically about the opportunity to enact informed consent within the geography of the freak show of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the same historical period that saw the rise of capitalism and neoliberalism wherein disabled people were, as we still are, understood as taking from, rather than contributing to, capitalist economies, and we are thusly understood to be part of the valueless, undesirable population (Owen & Parker Harris, 2012). This historical context requires us to think critically about the opportunity for disabled people to consent to perform in freak shows by their own free will, not for their intellectual capacity, but for the constrains imposed on them by neoliberal cultural and economic practices (Gerber, 1996, pp. 40-42). I do, however, think it is important to recognize the agency and resistance of disabled people when telling this part of our history, lest we allow these geographic containers contain the agency of the people forced into them and, following Equiano, “curtail resistances” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi).

many ways, including in the cultural production of “drapetomania,” a so-called “disease of the mind” that caused enslaved people to escape slave quarters and plantations (p. 38). In 1851, Cartwright pathologized this act of resistance through the creation of this disease, which he claimed, “struck slaves whose masters had “made themselves too familiar with them, treating them as equals” (Cartwright as cited in Baynton, 2001, p. 38). And this was an easy “disease” to apply to enslaved people, who were already pathologized as intellectually disabled, regardless of whether or not they had impairments (Baynton, 2001, p. 33),
At the same time as disabled bodies and other bodies of difference were put on display in freak shows, a cultural practice which officially spanned the nineteenth century and twentieth century, disabled people were also hidden away, through practices such as the “ugly laws,” in America during the mid to late 1800s, which exiled socially and economically undesirable bodies from public space (Schweick, 2010). In 1881, Chicago ratified the American ugly law, which stated:

Any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in any way deformed, so as to be an unsightly or undesirable object, or an improper person to be allowed in or on the streets, highways, thoroughfares or public place in this city, shall not therein or thereon expose himself to public view, under the penalty of a fine of $1 [about $20 today] for each offense. (Chicago City Code, 1881 [as cited in Schweick, 2010, pp. 1-2].)

The wording of this law was common throughout other state laws that prevented disabled people from entering into the public sphere (Schweick, 2010, p. 2). These laws, obviously custodial in nature, corresponded with the emergence of global capitalism and the rise of the middle class in North America (Schweick, 2010, p. 17). It was assumed that if disabled people [non-laborers] were socially conspicuous, then their social presence as non-workers, by example, would distract people from the labour force and ultimately be detrimental to capitalism, which depended on, and therefore desired, citizens who contributed to the labour market (Schewick, 2010, pp. 17-19). Though different in their execution, these laws, which sought to banish disabled people from public space, served a similar social function as slave ships and slave quarters, which occurred two centuries prior. (One notable difference is that the slave trade recognized
black people, when enslaved, as valuable to capitalism, while the ugly laws were indicative of the cultural understanding that disabled people were nothing but an unduly harsh strain on capitalist economy.) Similarly to the colonial logic of the slave trade, the ugly laws did geographic work, “containing and regulating,” (McKittrick, 2006, p. x) as it hid, disabled humanity, naturalizing the understanding that these bodies should be eliminated from social space and social thought.

Practices of containing through hiding and containing through displaying disabled people extended well into the institutionalization era of the nineteenth century in North America and the United Kingdom and are practices that continue today. The middle of the nineteenth century also marked the beginning of the institutionalization of disabled people and mad people (Reaume, 2009; Voronka, 2008). Voronka’s (2008) work on “mad spaces” brings together geography and discourse when she discusses how, in order for the space of institutions to be specifically understood as “sites of mad containment,” they must be understood as “a problem space” in public discourse of the mid-nineteenth century (p. 46). This social discursive understanding was secured by the practice of displaying disabled and mad people, a practice common to particular nineteenth century asylums, specifically institutions located in the city centre, such as the Toronto Hospital for the Insane (1839-1940; now known as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Queen Street site) (Reaume, 2009). On Sunday afternoons, inmates would be permitted, likely forced, to roam the grounds surrounding the Toronto Hospital, behind the patient-built wall, so that families visiting the freak shows at the Toronto Exhibition, could venture up to the hospital to see more ‘freaks’ on display (Reaume, 2009). In these ways, institutional spaces—the buildings themselves and the sprawling lawns which typically
surrounded them—functioned to contain and strategically display “deviant” bodies/minds while also serving as topographical symbols of insanity, criminality, and danger thus guaranteeing, though impossibly so, that all other public spaces were geographies of safety and sanity (Voronka, 2008). The production of the Queen Street site, then and now, as a space of what Voronka (2008) terms “mad degeneracy,” which, in turn, produced inmates as ‘mad,’ and back again, served and still serves the social function of assuring those of us on the outside that we are not ‘mad’; we are normal. Such geographic work, resembling the containment of slavery in the geographic site of the slave ship, ensures that all other spaces are geographies of normativity… places without slaves, without “the insane”, “cripples”: geographies of safety. More than this, these institutions were, as they still are, infused with ways of knowing, or interpreting, the humanity of those who are geographically contained in such spaces; a “knowing” that is enforced as such cultural containers become naturalized as the rightful place of belonging for disabled and racialized people within the nation-state. In this way, both disability (as abnormalcy) and normalcy are produced, in part, through geography and discourse, specifically, geographic containers and the ways that we speak about them.

A contemporary and personal example of how the meaning of social geography produces the meaning of people (as ‘mad’) can be found in the story which opens Erick Fabris’s book *Tranquil Prisons: Chemical Incarceration Under Community Treatment Orders*. Fabris’s story details Fabris’s experience on a psychiatric ward in a general hospital where he was incarcerated after his behaviour, dancing in a bakery, was clarified and classified as not just strange, but, consequently, ‘mad.’ As a result of this
clarification, Fabris was institutionalized. Upon waking up after being chemically sedated upon arrival, Fabris (2011) writes,

After what seems like twenty minutes, I come out of my room to ask if anyone will see me. I call softly, ‘Is anyone there?’ It seems quiet. I take a few steps forward. Shadows shift behind plants and counters, like a world being shuffled.

A second later I am being surrounded by waving arms and bodies, pressing in on me without touch.

Six males of different sizes, aggressively hunched. Yelling!

‘Get back in the room, please! Get back in the room!’ Their voices rise. My hands go open.

I try to rest assure, ‘Okay, okay.’ Surrender. They holler and walk me back to the room. pp. 13-14.

Waking up alone in a strange place without any knowledge of how you got there, would be good reason to attempt to determine if anyone was around. Aggressive yelling and force “without touch” as a response to such a request seems extreme—‘unreasonable,’ violent, even (Fabris, 2011, p. 13). And in another space, such as a hotel or even another floor of the hospital, this response to Fabris’s request would be read as, perhaps, criminal, or, at least, extremely and unnecessarily hostile. But in the space of the psychiatric ward this response is reasonable, even acceptable. For in this space and in Fabris’s role as mental patient, his behaviour, regardless of how he was behaving, was read as ‘irrational,’ dangerous, ‘crazy,’ and in need of a hostile response. Regardless of what
Fabris was experiencing in his mind, body, senses, and emotions, the physical space of this ward and the discursive meaning it was infused with, _made_ him ‘mad.’

Containing and displaying anomalous—disabled and mad—bodies does cultural work. As my engagement with Clare, Schwick, Reaume, Voronka, and Fabris’ work demonstrates, the containment and display of these bodies of difference does the cultural work of producing normalcy; indeed, the production of normalcy is, in part, geographic work. The production of normalcy in nineteenth century North America, a period of industrialization and nation-building, had everything to do with the production of the neo-liberally productive, desirable, citizen. In this way, nation-building was heavily invested in, and, in part, achieved through the cultural production of the abnormal citizen, for this production provided a sense of who was a normal citizen. In the nineteenth century emerged a new technique of power, biopower, that was different but not separate from the eighteenth century’s disciplinary power imposed on individual bodies through practices of separation, sterilization, and surveillance (Foucault, 2000, p. 242). This new power, not concerned with individual bodies but, rather, with the “human race,” is what Foucault (2000) refers to as biopolitics (p. 243). Biopower, a technique of biopolitics, ruled through the establishment of “statistical science,” which brought with it the concept that every aspect of human life could be measured and charted, thus establishing a “norm” or a “medium” (Foucault, 2000, p. 243). This “norming,” (Foucault, 2000, p. 243) which still occurs today, emerged out of biopolitics as a technique for managing a population to the end of creating a strong citizenry, which was regarded as a necessary component for establishing and maintaining a strong nation.
Thinking through the production of disability, and in line with Foucault’s articulation of biopower and biopolitics, Lennard Davis (1995) writes, “Statistics is bound up with eugenics because the central insight of statistics is that a population can be normed” (p. 30).

For once a norm is established through statistical science, the population becomes divided into normal and abnormal subpopulations. The next step to such a division of the population, according to eugenicists and exemplified by their aim, is the norming or the elimination of the abnormal subpopulation. Of course, as Davis (1995) also tells us, the eugenic goal to norm or remove the abnormal is “profoundly paradoxical since the inviolable rule of statistics is that all phenomena will always conform to a bell curve” (p. 30). The production of the ‘norm’ and ‘corporeal normalcy,’ or “corporeal standard” (Kumari-Campbell, 2009), in the nineteenth century as it remains today, has everything to do with the production of abnormalcy. And so we will keep producing bodies as ‘abnormal’ through practices of containment, concealment, and

25 Lennard Davis’s (1995) research reveals that French statistician Adolphe Quetelet contributed the most to a generalized notion of the normal as the imperative (p. 26). For his statistical determination of human norms, Quetelet worked with a “theory of errors”. This was a method traditionally used by astronomers in order to locate stars by charting all recorded star sightings on to a graph (1995, p. 26). In such plotting, the incorrect sightings would fall to the sides since they were less frequent and the correct sightings, the most frequent, would cluster together in the middle, thus forming the shape of a bell. Quetelet discovered that this method of statistical charting could be used to determine the averages of the human body, such as weight and height. However, because he worked with the notion of the social constructed norm, or ‘the normal,’ as the imperative, Quetelet ranked ideal human attributes rather than charting the actual qualities of the population. Thus, his formulation of l’homme moyen or the “average man” through the bell curve was not representative of the majority, but rather the ideal (Davis, 1995, p. 26). Because the average paradoxically becomes the ideal, as Quetelet suggests, “an individual who epitomized in himself, at any given time, all of the qualities of an average man, would represent at once all of the greatness, beauty, and goodness of that being” (cited in Davis, 1995, p. 27). And so it was that this “average” human created by statistical calculation was indeed fictitious. Moreover, for its dependence on the abnormal for the creation of the average, creating a population of ideal citizens was an impossible pursuit. As is evidenced by the bell curve, the determination of the desired citizen—Quetelet’s ‘average’ man, the ‘norm’—is always constituted by its deviations, which creates the bell curves extremities. Thus, disabled people, along with other social (raced, classed) ‘undesirables,’ were, as they still are, required to occupy the margins, to fill in our understanding of what abnormalcy is in order to constitute the norm as such. In other words, we know what normalcy is by what it is not. As much as we are culturally invested in the construction of normalcy, we are also invested in the construction of abnormalcy.
exhibition in order to ‘know’—to make culturally apparent—“the contours and boundaries of what we take to be human” (Garland-Thomson, 1996, p. 1). There is fierce cultural investment in the production of abnormalcy, a production that is achieved, in part by containing and displaying bodies of difference, ensuring that the public ‘knows,’ what is abnormal, actualizing its meaning. Given all of this, and reflecting back to Gleeson’s (1999) work cited earlier in this chapter, the spatial oppression of disabled people will never be “eliminated” by attending to the ways that we are excluded by structural barriers (p. 3); there is too much cultural investment. Rather, the relationship between disability and geography is in need of deeper “philosophical attention,” which attends to the complexities of how where we are placed has everything to do with how we are made meaningful (Kafer, 2013, p. 129). As this chapter demonstrates, the meaning we make of geography has everything to do with how the people within geographic spaces are made meaningful.

In analogous and overlapping, tangled ways, disabled people, too, occupy a contradictory space of belonging and not in normative culture (Walcott, 2003, p. 22). The complex imbrication of the meaning of disability and race produced through colonial and ableist logic becomes strictly apparent when we attend to the ways that disabled, racialized, and disabled racialized bodies were transported through routes of diaspora travel. Using historical and contemporary examples, I trace out a few ways that race and disability were and still are produced as undesirable in comingling ways dwelling in how constructs of disability and race worked together to make each other legible. I continue to articulate how these bodies of difference were and are assigned meaning by and through our geographic placement in

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26 In her book, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Politic*, Erevelles (2011) uses the phrase “normative space” to refer to the global north (p. 22).
comingling ways as a way of leading up to a discussion of how crip communities rework geographies and meanings of disability, which I take up in chapters three and four.

Late nineteenth and twentieth century US immigration practices, which are practices of diaspora travel, provide further evidence of the complexities that arise when we attend to the imbricated meanings made of race and disability in the context of global capitalism. Under the 1882 US Immigration Act, disability officially became grounds upon which to deny entry to potential immigrants (Molina, 2006, p. 24). This Act legalized the exclusion of any immigrant deemed to be a, “convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of him or herself without becoming a public charge” (Molina, 2006, p. 24). However, as Natalia Molina’s analysis in her chapter, Medicalizing the Mexican: Immigration, race, and disability in the early Twentieth-century United States reveals, disability, as grounds for exclusion, was applied differently to different kinds of potential immigrants, disabled and non-disabled alike. Focusing on Ellis Island, the point of entry for many people who were trying to immigrate to the United States, Douglas Baynton’s work demonstrates how the exclusion of disabled people, one of the principal aims of US immigration laws, was mobilized in order to discriminate on the basis of race, which was prohibited under the newly emerging liberalism (Baynton, 2001, p. 47). Racialized people were routinely prevented from immigrating on the basis of perceived or constructed disability, regardless of whether or not the person attempting to immigrate was impaired (Baynton, 2001, p. 47). Immigration officers would observe potential immigrants carrying their luggage up the stairs and if they appeared to be struggling or have bad posture, they would be disqualified from entering the country on the basis of disability (Baynton, 2001, p. 48). As one immigration officer observed, “It was no more difficult to detect poorly built, defective, or broken down human beings than to recognize a
cheap or defective automobile” (Baynton, 2001, p. 48). It is clear that disability was used as a justification for inequality, to borrow from the title of Baynton’s chapter, specifically the exclusion of racialized people deemed ‘unfit’ for entry into the United States by immigration officers. David Mitchell & Sharon Snyder (2003) speak to the logic of this practice when they write, “Disability as the master trope of disqualification in modernity prefaces an understanding of inassimilable racial and ethnic differences by providing an empirical designation for ‘unfit’ bodies” (p. 861). And while it is true that ableist immigration policies were being evoked to justify exclusion of racialized people regardless of whether or not they were impaired, we cannot simply say that these bodies were ‘fit’ and inaccurately constructed as disabled in order deny them entry at a time when exclusion because of race was disapproved of while exclusion of the basis of disability was enforced. Rather, when we observe how meaning was made of these bodies within Ellis Island and the geographies of other US immigration entry points at this time, we can understand that bodies were classified as fit and unfit in relation to a specific “corporal standard” (Campbell, 2009): the bodies ‘let in’ must be fit to labour. According to this “corporal standard,” one that desires the racialized labourer, one’s ability to labour supersedes any other health condition.

An example of how immigrants who were deemed effective labourers would be ‘let in’ despite their medical/medicalized record, an example that emerges from and engenders the complexity of how race and disability are clarified at one, is the case of the Mexican immigrants of the early twentieth century, as taken up in Molina’s chapter. Molina draws on Baynton’s work, in which he notes that, “beyond the targeting of disabled people, the concept of disability was instrumental in crafting the image of the undesirable immigrant” (Baynton, cited in Molina, 2006, p. 24). This demonstrates how the category of disability was enacted to
justify the exclusion of immigrants who were undesirable to the labour force and it also reveals the malleability of immigration criteria. At this time, “because these immigrants were considered advantageous only to the extent that they filled critical gaps in the labor market, physical fitness was central to gauging a group’s desirability” (Molina, 2006, p. 24). More than central, the physical fitness (ability to labour) of these immigrants would override their health conditions. Male Mexican labourers, who were constructed as “uniquely able-bodied” for their ability to perform physical labour in the agriculture, mining, and railroad industries, were let into the United States despite the fact that the death rate of people with tuberculosis was almost twice as high amongst Mexicans when compared to Americans (Molina, 2006, pp. 24-26). In these cases, US immigration officials chose to define the high rates of tuberculosis as a condition that was not a threat to public health and, therefore, not grounds to deny a potential immigrant entry (Molina, 2006, p. 26). In this case, racialized Mexican labourers were desirable immigrants even if they had tuberculosis.

In their historical analysis of how race and disability are clarified at once in the geographic space of US entry points, Molina and Baynton reveal how practices of colonialism had much investment in and contributed to (ever-shifting and interpretive) constructions of normalcy (and were invested in keeping constructions of normalcy shifting and interpretive). Indeed, through colonial logic, which circulated in these geographic spaces, difference must either be normalized as productive or excluded (Grech, 2012, p. 54). Speaking to the tangled way that meanings of immigrant bodies, disabled or not, were clarified through colonial and ableist logic, according to the site-specific “corporeal standard”

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27 These high mortality rates were obviously related to lack of access to adequate healthcare.
(Kumari-Campbell, 2009) requirements to be contributive to the neoliberal agenda, Grech (2012) \(^{28}\) writes:

> In the colonial enterprise, notions of ‘defectiveness’ and ‘sub-normality,’
> for example, were employed to the broad subjugation of the colonialized
> subject—‘intellectual normality’ and ‘disability’ as self-evident—one the
> ideal and the other in need of a cure. (p. 54)

To further explore the entangled processes through which disabled, mad, and racialized people were rendered abnormal and resultantly placed in geographies of containment, a placement central to the colonial project, I turn to Anne McClintock’s text, *Double Crossings: Madness, Sexuality, and Imperialism*. This text traces out the entangled ways that racialized people were rendered mad in parts of Africa that had been colonized and people understood as mad were rendered racial deviants in European counties in the mid-twentieth century, which is around the same time geographies of insanity emerged in Canada (McClintock, 2001, p. 19). Throughout her text, McClintock traces out the ways that racialized people living in colonized countries in Africa were diagnosed as mad and subsequently contained in geographies on insanity, mad and disabled people, along with unemployed people and the working class, homosexuals, criminals, sex workers, were rendered “racial deviants” and incarcerated in prisons by the police in parts of Europe, including the UK (McClintock, 2001, p. 10; 17). Before the 1930s, prisons and mental hospitals were often attached, the mental hospital annexed off of the prison connected by a pathway, its structure resembling a prison rather than a clinic with its shackles and handcuffs, straight-jackets and cells, bars and concrete floors

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\(^{28}\) In this passage, Grech is speaking to the way ableist and colonial logic were operationalized within the context of the formal period. However, elsewhere in his chapter, Grech discusses how these logics work together contemporarily as well.
(McClintock, 2001, p. 26). Through this tracing out of practices in colonizing and colonized nations, she points to the centrality of diagnosing people as mad and subsequently containing them to projects of imperialism.

To begin this tracing, McClintock offers a story. The story she tells set in the 1930s, of South African short-story and novelist Bessie Head (McClintock, 2001, pp. 9-10). Head’s mother, Bessie Emery, was judged insane and subsequently placed in a South African mental hospital from 1937 to 1943 because she, a white woman, had become pregnant with a black man (McClintock, 2001, p. 9). When Head was born, she immediately became a ward of the state and bounced around different foster homes (McClintock, 2001, p. 10). Throughout her childhood, Head was warned that if she was not careful, she would, “get insane just like her mother” (McClintock, 2001, p. 10). Emery committed suicide in the mental hospital six years after her daughter was born (McClintock, 2001, p. 9). This story exemplifies how, “‘madness’ in the colonies was […] a boundary discourse, a discourse about cultural conflicts of value” (McClintock, 2001, p. 26).

In the beginnings of colonization, African women were regarded as too lacking in mental complexity to become mad (McClintock, 2001, p. 26). But by the early decades of the twentieth century, at the time Emery was incarcerated in the mental institution, madness had become employed as a discourse of territoriality: “for African women, to be mad was to be out of place” (McClintock, 2001, p. 26). In this sense, it was not that all African women were rendered ‘mad.’ To use McClintock’s (2001) term, African women were rendered, “normally abnormal, but generally sane, as long as they remained within accepted bounds” (2001, p. 27). An African woman became mad when she strayed,
particularly when she trespassed on what was perceived to be “white space,” ironic given the colonial context (McClintock, 2001, p. 27).

At the time when Emery was incarcerated for her “out-of-place,” deviant behaviour, becoming an unwed, white mother with a black man, it was not uncommon for unwed mothers to be diagnosed as mentally ill (McClintock, 2001, p. 27; 11). For example, under Britain’s Mental Deficiency Act, passed in 1913, gave local authorities the jurisdiction to lock up unwed mothers—deemed ‘sexually immoral’ in mental institutions, often for life and always without appeal (McClintock, 2001, p. 11). There was similar legislation in South Africa at this time (McClintock, 2001, pp. 11-13). Indeed, as McClintock (2001) writes, “uncontrolled sexuality seemed the major, almost defining, symptom of insanity in women” (p. 11). However, she uses the story of Bessie Emery and Bessie Head to demonstrate that racist, colonial, and sexist logic all worked together to render Emery and many other women and girls as ‘mentally insane.’ In these concurrent examples, it is clear that geographies of deviancy, such as prisons and mental hospitals, were, “critical threshold institutions for managing cultural conflicts in value and for transforming local labour and cultural values in values useful and palatable to the colonials” (McClintock, 2001, p. 26). Given that such geographic placement was bestowed on African women who strayed, given that such placement was contributory to the project of colonialism, and given that mental institutions were also geographies charged with the task of curing people, it would follow that curing the African women in mental institutions were cured by becoming a docile, pliable, domestic worker (McClintock, 2001, p. 28). Important to the developing argument in this chapter, McClintock’s work on how the category of madness was used to contain and domesticate
African women is how this genealogy reveals how making legible the racialized and disabled and mad subjects are intensely interwoven processes. More than this, and referring back to Baynton’s (2007) argument presented on page 84, it is revealed how, yet again, disability functions as an ultimate justification for discrimination (p. 47). African women who traversed colonial ideas of racialized gendered spaces were rendered mad with ease, as the pliability of this category allows for, and therefore incarcerated without any further explanation.

Contemporarily, as Helen Meekosha (2011a; 2011b) and Nirmala Erevelles (2011a; 2011b) discuss in their work, the meaning we make of disability and race in the geographic spaces of US entry points are not entirely separate processes, nor is this meaning detached from the geography. In these ‘entry spaces,’ immigration officers interpret bodies in reference to constructions of normalcy which, in this particular geography, are heavily tied to conceptions of the way productivity is understood within neoliberalism. The immigrants ‘let in’ must be able to contribute to, and not take from, the national economy. Speaking further to the entanglement of how colonial and ableist logic produce a corporeal standard, Erevelles’s (2011) work reveals how eugenic and immigration practices work to prevent disabled and racialized bodies from living in particular countries.

29 It is the Council of Canadians with Disabilities official position that the Canadian Immigration Act continues to discriminate against disabled people (http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/immigration, Retrieved on June 13, 2014). They state, “CCD believes the Immigration Act, both as law and in its practice, continues to discriminate against persons with disabilities and does not meet the equality guarantees of the Charter” (2014). The case of Karen Talosig, an immigrant from the Philippines, and her deaf daughter Jazmine who is still living in the Philippines and is trying to immigrate, is example of how constructions of race and disability comingle to create racialized disabled people as excludable. This is also an example of and implication of such constructions within Canadian Immigration policy. Talosig applied for permanent residency for both herself and her daughter in 2010 and her daughter’s application is stalled indefinitely under medical review with no sign of a decision. (CBC News, May 30, 2014).
or living at all (p. 129). Erevelles’s (2011, p. 129) work unpacks the ways that
eugenic and immigration practices and policies bear a haunting resemblance for
the way that both practices are aimed at forcefully preventing disabled and
racialized people from living in our midst. Racist immigration practices and
ableist eugenic practices could be articulated as separately targeting racialized and
disabled people; however, they are, indeed, entangled manifestations of the
pervasive and circulating production of the meaning of disabled, racialized, and
disabled racialized bodies as undesirable and thus disposable citizens (Erevelles,
2011) 30. The production of some bodies as ‘normal’ and others as ‘abnormal’
sustains our economy, our medical and pharmaceutical complex, and our
educational industrial complex. There is much cultural investment in sustaining
such an abnormal/normal divide, a divide which is sustained through living and
non-living examples of abnormalcy and, therefore, who is not desired.

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There is much investment in the geographic containment, both materially and
discursively, of disability. Contained by hospitals, we are rendered nothing other than a
problem of medicine. Contained by mental healthcare centres, we remain problems of
sanity, civil compliance, and domesticity. Prisons contain us as problems of lawful
compliance and civil society. Special education classrooms contain us as educational
problems. Group homes contain us as problems of the “community.” In the midst of all of

30 For an analysis of how the production of raced and disabled students sustains the educational industrial
complex, please see Watts & Erevelles (2004).
these normative geographies of disability—places in which disability ‘normally belongs’ in the nation-state according to national discourses and (dis)investments—it is easy to sympathize with Brand’s (1997) desire for “no country” (p.1). However, McKittrick (2006) writes, “Geography is not […] secure and unwavering; we produce space, we produce its meanings, and we work very hard to make geography what it is” (p. xi). As an example of this she offers, “The physicality of the slave ship [contributes] to the process of social concealment and dehumanization but, importantly, black subjectivity is not swallowed up by the ship itself” (McKittrick, 2006, xii). Likewise, as I elaborate throughout this work, we can produce the space and meaning of disability differently… communally.

Disabled and racialized people are produced as deviant bodies who are both desirable and undesirable in entangled ways. Racialized people of the African diaspora, indigenous people, refugees, poor people, and people who are otherwise produced as social deviants, are all undesired by the state, particularly under neoliberalism, for these people are understood as taking from, rather than contributing to, the economy of the state. Bodies produced as social deviants are also desired by the state in many ways. Disabled people and the care-work we may require makes up a large part of the “helping sector,” (Longmore, 1999; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006) which is vital to our economy. The economy also depends on migrant workers, “illegal” workers, and immigrant workers to

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31 As enslaved laborers, racialized people of the African diaspora were understood as advantageous to the growth of capitalism. Contemporarily, largely kept in the class of ‘working poor’ by systemic racism and ongoing colonialism, black people are socially recognized as both contributing to and taking from the project of global capitalism.

keep the work force “competitive,” contribute or, put differently, have access to workers who are constructed as those who are not in need of, or deserving of, an equitable wage. Reflecting back on the previous section’s discussion of the social work that spaces of deviancy, the asylum, for example, do, we know that as a society with much investment in normalcy, itself not natural, but, indeed, socially produced, we require versions—bodies—of abnormalcy to be in our midst.

By a political process of diaspora travel\(^{33}\), which McKittrick (2009) describes as “not travel for pleasure or by choice”, racialized people of the diaspora arrive in a new national ‘home’ that may not welcome them as desired citizens (p. 151). Thusly, diaspora travel reveals the violent contradictions of neoliberalism: that is, globalization, imperialism, and neo-colonialism depletes the global South of resources, through processes such as structural adjustment programs, thereby causing a need for racialized people to relocate to the global North. Through this diasporic journey, racialized people are modeling the ultimate neoliberal subject: through the industrialization of global travel, they pursue a ‘better life.’ However, and herein lies one of the contradiction of neoliberalism, once they arrive, the very processes which forced them to relocate, colonialism, whose logic allows for such as racist state practices and state-sanctioned public racism, prevents racialized people of the diaspora to complete the final step required of the neoliberal subject (Walcott, 2003). Racism prevents immigrants from the African and Caribbean diaspora from ‘picking themselves up by the bootstraps,’ a neoliberal myth with currency, for they arrive in a land that does not desire them as citizens (Walcott, 2003). Of course, for the ways that people of the diaspora serve as

\(^{33}\) Here, in line with McKittrick’s work (2006; 2009) and Walcott’s work (2003), I am referring to the African diaspora which is occurring after the formal colonial period.
public reminders of who are ‘natural citizens,’ who are the ‘deserving rich,’ who are ‘skilled workers’ and deserve to be paid as such, essentially who belongs ‘here’, they are also strongly desired.

Walcott’s book *Black Like Who?: Writing Black Canada*, explores urban black diaspora community in Canada. He thinks through how black communities in Toronto are formed in the midst of widespread racial profiling by Toronto police—claims of which are rarely taken seriously by authorities such as public media— the dismissal of the potential epidemic of black men killing each other, and black people’s appeals for social justice which remain largely unacknowledged due to the racist public imagination of black Canadians as ‘dangerous’ (Walcott, 2003, p. 13). Despite such hostile inhospitality by the Canadian government, police force, public media, and the general population, black diaspora subjects have made Canada their home and the site for their communities (Walcott, 2003, p. 13-14). Within the context of a climate that is so violently inhospitable, Walcott’s (2003) work engages the question, “Do we belong or do we not belong?” (pp. 11-13). The circumstances of neoliberalism that, at once, transport racialized people around the globe and treat them with such violent discrimination once they arrive, demonstrates the particular way that, “diaspora conditions work to produce black people within the contradictory space of belonging and not” (Walcott, 2003, p. 22). Walcott (2003) continues, “The simultaneity of being here and not being here is, in effect, an in-between position” (p. 22).

In the midst of all of this hostility, Walcott writes, “Black people in North America continue to make both space and place theirs” (2003, p. 45), demonstrating how the rules of geography are alterable (McKittrick, 2006, p. x). Speaking in the context of people of
the African diaspora living in Britain, C.L.R. James (1984) tells us that black people who were born, educated and brought up in Britain, are people “who are intimately related to the British people, but cannot be fully part of the English environment because they are Black” (cited in Mercer, 1994, p. 55). In this way, people of the diaspora in Britain occupy the in-between space that Walcott articulates in a Canadian context. What I find useful, even exciting, in what James is saying, particularly for its implications for how we might forge crip community in this space of contradiction, is the way that he is describing how we might occupy this in-between space differently, in a way that is (sub)culturally productive and generative of a necessary cultural critique. James (1984, cited in Mercer, 1994) writes,

Those people who are in western civilization, who have grown up in it yet are not completely a part (made to feel and themselves feeling that they are outside) have unique insight into their society. […] What such persons have to say, therefore, will give a new vision, a deeper and stronger insight into both western civilization and black people in it. p. 55.

The cultural activity of developing and perpetuating such a critique as James describes is necessary and valuable and can arguably only be developed from the unique vantage-point of being a part of and, at once, apart from normative culture. Disabled people have a history of offering similar critique, engaging in what Kobena Mercer (1994) terms “communifying practices” 34, which resist our wanted elimination with claims that “we

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34 For example, the Black Gay group whose collective writing was “an essential part of provoking a feeling of belonging and gave a voice to black gay issues and experiences” (Mercer, 1994, p. 10). Crip communities, as I have experienced them, have “communifying practices,” which provoke feelings of belongingness. Because one cannot predict that a feeling will be generated until it is, it would not be possible to have a list of what these practices are. The gesture of providing straws with drinks at an event, for example, is a communifying practice of crip community for that it imagines that disabled people and
[are] *here to stay*” (p. 8). Analogous communifying practices in the disability rights movement are the protests organized by Not Dead Yet, discussed in chapter one. These protests gather together members of the disability community who respond to the legalization of assisted suicide understood to be state-sanctioned killings of disabled people by demonstrating that disabled life is vibrant and necessary.

**Geographic Stories**

As I have demonstrated so far in this chapter, the meaning-making of people and the meaning-making of space are entangled processes. Exploring these processes in the context of the production of disabled and racialized people—specifically racialized people of the diaspora—as I have just done, makes apparent that the production of people as abnormal and undesirable on particular plots of land has everything to do with the cultural production of normalcy. We also know that in the midst of occupying the in-between space of belonging and not, we can work out new ways of belonging to each other and to the culture more broadly within these contradictory spaces (Walcott, 2002). Further along, I engage different stories of difference that are provoked when we critically engage the connection between disability and geography, stories such as Piepzna-Samarasinha’s (2009) story of the river that opened this chapter. Some of these stories, stories of how the environment produces impairment, or what Puar (2011) refers
to as “debility,” are complicated stories. These are stories that may, at first encounter, may appear disruptive to our disability politics, particularly our understandings of disability pride. However, before I get to Puar, and through her work, engage Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story again, I want to first make a case for how disability studies is able to hold different stories of difference.

In the introduction to his book, *The Difference that Disability Makes* (2002), Michalko (2002, p. 6) tells us that however we may experience life with disability, we do so in the midst of such representations. Throughout his introductory chapter, Michalko (2002, pp. 6-7) discusses the many ways that disability studies offers a political perspective through which disability is understood as a collective issue and a collective experience in order to resist the pervasive ways that disability is typically represented as an individual issue in our culture in accordance to ableist logic. Michalko is articulating a foundational impetus for the disability movement: That we, disabled people, are represented, and therefore understood, as non-human and our disabled lives are represented, and therefore understood, as undesired and without value. As this dissertation explores, we live in a culture in which disability is often storied but rarely are stories of disability by disabled people given credence, except when these stories confirm a medical model understanding of disability, articulating disability as regrettable, remorseful, or a problem in need of solution. Medical, psychiatric, literary, bureaucratic, eugenic, colonial, immigration policy stories, in which disability is figured as an undesirable life, a life worth eliminating, flourish; they are pervasive. Given that disabled people live in a world that represents and recognizes us as non-human, our scholarly

35 Please see Titchkosky’s (2008) analysis of people-first language in her chapter, “A Rose by Any Other Name: People-first Language in Canadian Society.” This discussion reveals how bureaucratic
and political work must begin with claiming our humanity. Disability studies and politics locates emancipatory possibility in creating and perpetuating understandings of disability through writing, stories, art, activism and daily life which are different from how society typically conceives of disability. And because, as this dissertation asserts, there are so many stories of disability—lots of which we will never encounter—we must orient to the disability stories that we have encountered as an incomplete archive. Seeking out different stories of difference is important work and it may never be complete.

Throughout his book, Michalko thinks through the relationship between ‘difference’ and ‘disability,’ primarily through the experience of suffering, which he removes from its culturally understood location—the disabled body—and, instead, places suffering firmly in the social; disability, though it may pain the individual, is suffered by society. Recall my discussion of Michalko’s analysis of the Tracy Latimer killing, which I discussed in chapter one, in which he posits that although Robert Latimer claimed he killed his daughter to stop her suffering caused by disability, he was actually seeking to stop his own suffering. In his critical exploration throughout this book, Michalko addresses the question, ‘what is the difference disability makes?’ asserting that within Western modernity, this difference is only imagined in relation to how we perform activities (differently). That is, disabled people are different, but only in the way that we do things (Michalko, 2002, p. 146). However, Michalko (2002) elaborates, the difference of disability does not only arise from the different way we do things, as the language of nomenclature—people-first language—imagines disability as an antithesis to humanness. Out of this imagination, people-first language seeks to remind that disabled people are, indeed, human while at the same time removing any possibility that we may have community, culture, or collectivize in any other way as this language articulates us as a population rather than a personhood. The meaning made of disability out of people-first language feeds back into the imagination of disability an antithesis of humanness… and on it goes…
‘differently abled’ suggests. For the difference of disability also makes a cultural
difference. We experience the difference of disability in the midst of a culture that
represents disability as undesirable, as a life not worth living. We also experience
disability in the midst of a culture that understands disability as an individual, rather than
collective issue (Michalko, 2002). So, then, if the difference that my disability makes
means than I cannot easily open my office door with a traditional key and require an
accommodation in the form of either an alternative key, which comes with a financial
cost, or in the form of having help from a co-worker, which comes with a social cost, the
compromise of my all-important independence, this makes a social difference, too. The
difference that disability makes is rarely read as insignificant, much like the difference of,
say, race or immigration status and unlike the difference, perhaps, of if one is right-
handed or left-handed. It is not simply that some people open the door with their right
hand, some with their left, others ask their co-worker down the hall to open it for them
(and still others cannot get into the building at all, for a plethora of physical and social
barriers.) The difference of disability makes all of the difference and, referring to the
Critical clarification section in my first chapter, clarify all other differences.

Experience and representation exist in a cyclical, tangled relation to one another.
How disability is culturally represented influences how the public understands disability.
This understanding informs cultural expectations of disabled people and such
expectations effect how we experience disability. How we experience disability reflects
back another representation of disability into the world. These representations may
influence other representations of disability, changing public expectations for disabled
people. Or not. This is not a straightforward recipe for social change for we cannot guarantee how our experiences of disability will be interpreted.

The appearance of the difference that disability makes means something different from culture to culture, from place to place, for, as Michalko (2002) suggests, every collective has a way of representing and understanding disability. And, given that experiences and representations are entangled and mutually influencing, how disability is experienced must also change from culture to culture, from place to place. Mental disability might be understood as disruptive on the street, in need of containment in the hospital, criminal in the courtroom, desirable in the midst of a Mad Pride parade, and all of these and none of these understandings at once. And, given that our physical and emotional relationships to place change—we move from place to place; we understand these places differently—so too must our understanding, experience, and storying of disability change. In the midst of such flux, different stories of the difference that disability makes will certainly arise. Disability studies, disability politics, and, significant to this work, disability community, is provoked by and is shaped by different stories of difference. (An ever-expanding understanding of) we can open up, hold, and be shaped by different stories of difference, even when they are challenging to the ways we have come to know ourselves. And, as this chapter’s final section demonstrates, opening up to different stories of difference gives us a more robust sense of who we are and where we are in crip community.

Returning to the story that opened this chapter, I was initially drawn to Piepzna-Samarasinha’s (2009) story for the way that it storied how the meaning of (her) impairment and the meaning of (her) land were produced at the same time. Listening
deeply to this story propelled me to think about how impairment, sickness, and eventually disease, following Mol (2002), are produced by the environment. And how this production has everything to do with the meanings infused into bodies and the environments in which they live. Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story of difference, however, is different in the way that it dwells in the details of what causes disability; details to which I rarely, if ever, attend to. Typically in the disability movement in the global North, we tend not to spend much time thinking about the cause of impairment because this usually points us to biology gone wrong, and through this pointing, we arrive at an understanding of disability as individually located, with a static, singular meaning as a problem in need of a solution. This orientation to impairment and disability is asocial and apolitical. Conceptions of disability as a problem, which usually arise from seeking out or paying attention to what ‘caused’ them are antagonistic to the way our movement imagines disability, as a social phenomenon which emerges between us with shifting meaning, a legitimate way of life and, indeed, very political. However, Piepzna-Samarasinha’s storying of the cause of her impairment—environmental injury caused by environmental racism—tells a different story… we arrive at a different place. By attending to a material cause—the land, rather than biology—and further pointing to environmental racism, I am still positing the ‘cause’ or genesis of disability to be very political…and in this way, disability remains not a ‘thing’ but a “socio-political phenomenon” (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2010, p. 3), not in need of solution (impairment and disability, not environmental racism) but in need of critical attention, following Kafer’s call (2013). Identifying a biological cause for impairment is not always useful for describing experiences of disability and, more than this, can contribute to a reproduction of
dangerous eugenic discourses, which holds that if we can identify the biological cause of impairment we can then come closer to eliminating impairment altogether. At the same time, identifying, and even wanting to resist, as best we can, the environmental racist practices which lead to the environmental hazards which cause impairment, might be politically necessary.

At the time that I write this, stories of disability caused by environmental racism or neoliberal injury are relatively new stories told within disability studies, politics, and community. Even so, we can and do engage these stories. And we must, even when these stories complicate our politics. Such interrogation, which I am enacting through my engagement with Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story of difference, is my attempt to respond to Kafer’s critical call to think afresh the relationship between disability and the environment quoted at the beginning of this chapter. It is not as though this relationship is unexamined terrain; indeed, much has been made about the connection between disability and the environment. However, and again following Kafer, much of what has been made about this connection thus far, in both disability studies and activism and environmental studies and activism, has been relatively straightforward. Consider these three quotations one by environmental justice activist Valerie Ann Johnston, the second by environmental humanities and new materialist scholar Stacy Alaimo, and the last from Kafer. Johnston (1994, as cited in Kafer, 2013) tells us,

We [in the environmental justice movement] tend to conflate disability, disease and environmental injustice. What is needed is to disaggregate the possible result of environmental injustice (i.e., exposure to toxic
substances emanating from landfills or hog operations that injure the body) from the *person*, however they are embodied. p. 158.

And from Alaimo (2002, as cited in Kafer, 2013)

Disability studies and activism would be enriched by attending not only to the ways in which built environments constitute or exacerbate ‘disability,’ but also to how materiality, at a less perceptible level—that of pharmaceuticals, xenobiotic chemicals, air pollution, etc.—affect human health and ability. p. 158.

Kafer (2013) is clear we need environmental analyses that engage a disability studies perspective and,

[…] do more than cast disability and disabled minds/bodies as tragedies or aberrations, in part because focusing exclusively on disabled people as the signs of environmental injustice effaces the ways in which we are all affected by toxic pollution and contamination, not just those of use with visible or diagnosed “abnormalities”. p. 159.

Between these three quotations lies a critical challenge for all environmental and disability studies scholarship. Kafer is calling for us to not turn away from the complicated questions that emerge when we attend to the way that the hostile placement of bodies rendered disposable on land which is actively produced as toxic. Thinking seriously about the intimate relations between disability, race, and class requires us to complicate our disability politic by attending to the unjust ways that bodies become impaired through the environment while still holding close the understanding that disability is a life worth living… it can even be a part of us that brings us pride and
connection. Kafer’s call also requires environmental scholars and activists to resist the temptation to frame impairment as nothing more or less than regrettable in their fights against environmental racism and devastation. This is a challenge that disability studies can and must engage in order to open up to different stories of difference, an example of which is told to us by Piepzna-Samarasinha. How might we move carefully to disaggregate the (environmentally unjust) causes of impairment and the production of disability in order to open up to the understanding that environmental hazards have an impact on people’s health and ability? How might we also orient to environmental racism as something, a logic, which needs to be eliminated while, at the same time, fiercely preserve the understanding that disability is, for some, an embodied identity, a culture, and a politic, following Johnston and Alaimo? How might we do this work in such a way that acknowledges that environmental injustice affects all of us, and, at the same time, acknowledge that such injustices affect different (raced and classed) bodies differently, following Kafer? I think Piepzna-Samarasinha’s political and artistic work along with her story is demonstrative of the possibility of sitting between these questions, “sit[ting] gently and honestly with [these] contradictions” (Clare, p. 9, 2002). Piepzna-Samarasinha exemplifies that just as her disabled embodiment is political, so too is the cause of her disability. She is a member of Sins Invalid, which is a performance group working out of San Francisco, California. According to their artist statement, Sins, “incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of colour and queer and gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized” (Sins, para 1, 2009). Again from their statement, Sins “is committed to social and economic justice for all people with disabilities—in lockdowns, in shelters, on the streets,
visibly disabled, invisibly disabled, sensory minority, environmentally injured, psychiatric survivors—moving beyond individual legal rights to collective human rights” (Sins, para 1, 2009). We cannot be sure how Piepzna- Samarasinha relates to her impairment caused by environmental injury, or what Puar (2011) would call “debility,” in part because this is likely a shifting relation. However, we can confidently guess by her involvement in Sins, together with Sins’ statement that despite, or perhaps in spite, of the disgraceful neglect caused by environmental racism, Piepzna- Samarasinha is creatively inspired by, politically mobilizes, is collected by, and communifies around disability… regards disability rights as collective rights. On her blog and other performances, she represents disability as part of her identity and aligns herself with movements promoting disability pride. Here, perhaps, pride rubs disgrace (Chandler, 2010).

Piepzna- Samarasinha’s (2009) monologue also reveals that the production of disability is tightly bound up in the production of land: land makes disability (through impairment). Racialized people were placed on this particular land (a poor, industrial town) because of their racialization and poverty. Environmental racism caused the geography (specifically the water and the air) to be hazardous. In this way, the geography allowed for disability… it ushered disability in. And again, this is political. The US government did not bother to, or actively decided not to, clean the water of the poor, racialized town of Worcester, Mass. This caused the Blackstone River, which flowed underneath the town, to turn from the “myth of a pretty lady” into a “monster”, “filthy and sick”; “hidden away” (Piepzna- Samarasinha, para 5, 2009). We can easily suspect that the dirty water was not made clean because the people drinking the water out of the Blackstone River were not desirable citizens; they were poor and racialized. This was the
kind of geography that the government did not invest in; here the meaning of the
geography and the meaning of the people who live on it are entangled. These are stories
told to us when we pay attention to the entangled relationship between land and body.
Namely, the ways that the land can produce, in part, sickness, illness, impairment,
disability, and what Puar refers to as “debility” (2011). I am suggesting that attending to
the ways that the land is productive in this way may point us towards different stories of
difference, stories which story disability differently than it has been storied in our
movement (stories of disability pride, stories of congenital and hereditary disability,
stories of impairment located strictly in the body, for example.) These alternative stories
of disability may be different, but they are not ones that disability studies and politics
cannot handle; they are not stories that we cannot engage.

Following Kafer (2013), again, this next section thinks through her important and
difficult questions: “How can we continue the absolutely necessary task of challenging
toxic pollution and its effect without perpetuating cultural assumptions about the
unmitigated tragedy of disability?” (p. 159). At the same time, Kafer (2013) also asks,
“How can we attend to ‘serious health problems’ while also deconstructing the stigma
attached to those problems or even historicizing the very construction of such conditions
as problems?” (p. 159). I think through how we might, “sit gently and honestly with the
contradictions” (Clare, 2002, p. 9) Kafer’s questions raise.
The Difference that Debility Makes

Before following up on the chapter’s promise, the promise of community, I would first like to give one more example of why I think we need to be open to different stories of disability, stories which are necessary to open up to in order to have a fuller, more robust (though never complete) understanding of who we are and where we are in crip community. In her article, “The Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoints”, Puar (2011) is asking important questions of, and also with, disability studies about connections between body and geography and the meanings produced by this connection.

I want to put Puar’s discussion, which focuses on how debility is produced in the US, into conversation with Shawn Grech’s (2012) analysis put forth in his chapter, “Disability in the Majority World” in which he thinks through different ways that disability is infused with meaning transnationally. In this context, and in line with my unfolding discussion on the entangled production of geography and disability, Grech (2012) writes, “How we make meaning of people changes with the landscape. [...] When the context of the landscape changes, so, too, does the meaning of impairment (p. 58).

My discussion of Puar’s figuration of debility is animated by Grech’s provocations to think through how the material consequences of everyday life (geography, quantity and quality of healthcare and associated costs, household economy, etc.) contribute to the contextual, attitudinal, and circumstantial landscapes which give shape to the meaning of

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36 At the time that Puar’s article was published, her engagement with disability studies was fairly superficial. In The cost of getting better, however, Puar only gestures to disability studies’ work through two short quotes from ten years ago that are not given any context. However, since this article was published in 2011, it was published in Davis’s Disability Studies Reader, Fourth Edition (2013). Puar is also publishing a new book, which she positions within disability studies.
disability (Grech, 2012, p. 63). For example, impairment caused by workplace injury—a factory worker in a small, rural, industrial town, his family’s sole wage earner, losing a hand, for example—may have a particular meaning, and provoke particular material consequences, different from the experiences of someone born with one hand in a city. Grech (2012) suggests that disableism, too, is shaped by the conditions of everyday life and is also contributory to the shifting meaning we make of impairment and disability (p. 60). As an example, poverty would cause disablement to occur differently within a country whose healthcare one has to pay into than within a country with free healthcare. Even within a country with free healthcare, disablement would occur differently depending on one’s geographic location, which could determine their ability to access healthcare. I turn, now, to Puar’s articulation of “debility” in order to think with ‘different stories of difference’ that emerge when we pay attention to connections between land and embodiments (2011).

Writing in the context of the United States, Puar argues that Dan Savage’s anti-bullying campaign, *It Gets Better*, which emerged as a response to the increasing number of queer youth suicides in America in 2011, should not be read as purely a sympathetic and benevolent action (although we in the disability movement have always approached sympathy and benevolence with caution and critique). Puar (2011) frames her intervention as, “an attempt to go beyond a critique of the queer neoliberalism embedded in the tendentious mythologizing that ‘it gets better’ by confronting not only the debilitating aspects of neoliberalism but, more trenchantly, the economics of debility” (p. 149). In the US, with its fiercely imbedded medical industrial complex, ‘debility,’ Puar (2011) writes, is the cost incurred, or perhaps more precisely, the debt incurred from
trying to ‘get better’ (p. 149). Puar (2011) makes the case that in the US, where personal
debt incurred by medical expenses is the number one reason for filing for bankruptcy,
debility pays, and it pays well (p. 149). ‘Slow deaths,’ the “debilitating ongoingness of
structural inequality and suffering,” following Lauren Berlant, the incurring cost of the
failed attempt to get better, is essential to the US economy (Berlant, cited in Puar, 2011,
p. 149). Suicides, then, are financially injurious (Puar, 2011, 149). It would follow that
anti-suicide campaigns, like Savage’s It Gets Better, which encourages queer youth to
move to the city, attend (pay for) university, find a good job, and, perhaps, some good
anti-depressants, may be as much, or more, about ensuring that these youth become
contributories to the US economy through their participation in the labour market as well
as their support of the growing pharmaceutical industry as part of their ongoing
investment in ‘getting better.’

I am compelled by Puar’s analysis and her framing of ‘debility.’ I am particularly
intrigued by her positioning of this call to attend to the production of debility within
disability studies and I think this is an important call to heed when attending to Kafer’s
urging to pay critical attention to the production of land and bodies, as I do throughout
this chapter. In this positioning, Puar (2011) is challenging the way disability studies and
our movement upholds the “binarized production of disabled versus non-disabled bodies”
(p. 153). Such a distinction, Puar argues, elides bodies and narratives of those bodies
which are not easily included within our movement’s imagination of disability, but also
cannot be categorized as non-disabled—debilitated bodies. Attending to the concurrent
production of the meaning of geography and the people who live there, Puar’s (2011)
analysis reveals that debility—workplace injury, illness caused by poverty and
malnutrition, greater illness caused by untreated illness, illness caused by environmental hazards, which trace back to practices of environmental racism— is on the rise in precarious populations (pp. 154-155). This is especially so as the boundaries of what constitutes “capacity,” and therefore viable life, are becoming narrower and narrower (Puar, 2011, p. 154). Reflecting back on Grech’s (2012) assertion that the meaning we make of people, and the meaning we make of impairment changes as the landscape changes, we arrive at another different story of difference (p. 58). Stories of debility and impairment that potentially get elided when disability studies positions disability as a minority among a non-disabled majority, ignore entire working-poor and working-class communities of colour, in which people who are impaired by workplace injuries, by environmental racism, are not able to afford the cost of recovery (Puar, 2011, p. 153).

In Canada and the United States, entire towns of debilitated people are dying “slow deaths” (Berlant in Puar, 2011, p. 149) because they cannot afford to pay into getting better—towns like Worcester, Mass., places like Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia where high numbers of women in their 20s have cervical cancer and endometriosis caused by the pesticides sprayed on the apple trees in the 80s and 90s, First Nations communities in which aboriginal people are 3 to 5 times more likely to have diabetes, caused by lack of health care and proper food, which means that there are more and more blind people (blindness as an effect of diabetes) (Health Canada, 2011). Positioning disability as a minority category also discounts colonized countries wherein the majority of the population are impaired or live with trauma as a result of war or postwar effects (Erevelles, 2011a, p. 18).
What I find most fascinating about Puar’s call for disability studies to consider debility, particular to this work, is twofold and related. Firstly, Puar turned to disability studies when she could have turned elsewhere. Labour rights, critical race theory, Marxist feminism would all have been appropriate fields in which to position her call. But Puar turned to disability studies. Secondly, Puar is giving us a new word, ‘debility.’ Puar’s distinction between ‘disability’ and ‘debility’ could be due to her unfamiliarity with disability, particularly with the social model. And we, disability studies, could answer back that the social model has been theorizing the socio-structural ways that our world disables us since the 1980s; what Puar is calling ‘debility’ is already well within our ‘scope.’ However, I think that Puar is offering a different kind of critical attention to the connection between disability and the environment, and, in this way, is in line with Kafer’s (2013) call to pay philosophical attention to the cultural production of environment. What I find interesting about her lexical choice is that it leaves us with our current understanding of ‘disability.’ Puar could have articulated her argument in a way that demanded we broaden our operative definition of disability to include neoliberal injuries… but she didn’t. I would argue that these decisions—turning to disability studies and leaving ‘disability’ as is—is indicative of Puar’s respect for our field. Puar (2011, p. 153) recognizes and praises our field for disrupting normalcy for political, justice-oriented ends. Such a recognition positions our movement as being already in line with the radical, normative-disruptive work that Puar is calling for and, thusly, our movement is an ideal place to take up debility. Puar is not chiding our movement, as she could, and likely will be interpreted as doing. I think she is turning to us because she is recognizing

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37 Puar did publish this piece in GLQ, a queer studies journal, but she issued the challenge of taking up debility to disability studies in 2011 and it was reprinted in Davis’ Disability Studies Reader in 2013.
that disability studies is unique in its approach and effective in its work, in part for its
unique attention to the production of normalcy and disruption of its standard, which is
necessary for, and an effect of, rethinking debility38.

Regardless of Puar’s intention, I engage her work in this chapter because I think
her offering of ‘debility’ gives us another way to think about the intimate proximity of
the production between environments and bodies and the complicated set of questions
this proximate production gives rise to. Geographies can make us sick and ill,
geographies can make or keep us healthy, geographies can heal us. And nothing about
this rationality is neutral or natural, as I will reveal by using Puar’s work to once again
engage Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story. Her concept of ‘debility’ reveals yet another
example that the land that disabled and racialized bodies are placed on are inhospitable.
Puar’s emphasis of how impairment caused by debility is an effect of such hostile
geographic placement is a difficult, but necessary story to attend to while not slipping
into the understanding of disability as nothing more or less than regrettable injurious.
Such a complex web of meanings made of bodies on/and land animates the crux of
Kafer’s (2013) perhaps unanswerable question, “How can we continue the absolutely
necessary task of challenging toxic pollution and its effect [debility] without perpetuating
cultural assumptions about the unmitigated tragedy of disability?” (p. 159). I think
Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story provides an example of how we may, “sit gently and
honestly in our contradictions” (Clare, 2002, p. 9).

38 In their introduction to Re-Thinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader (2009), Titchkosky &
Michalko articulate disrupting normalcy as one of the key features of disability studies. Their work and
others are demonstrative of this articulation. Disrupting normalcy requires us first to attend to it. Such
attention and disruption is generative for lots of area studies disciplines, such as critical race theory and
queer theory.
Debility comes at the cost of neoliberal discourses’ heightened demands for bodily capacity, which marks out certain populations as those who experience the conditional causes of debilitation (Puar, 2011, p. 149). Following this articulation, Piepzna-Samarasinha’s town can easily be described as debilitated: neoliberal conditions and ideologies that regulate that federal funding should not be dispersed evenly but that the government should provide for productive (desirable, rich) citizens and neglect unproductive citizens in the interest of national capital growth. The citizens of Worcester, Massachusetts are discursively understood as disposable and thusly marked out as a population deserving of the conditions which cause debilitation. And they became debilitated. Drinking bad water caused an abundance of disability to arise in Piepzna-Samarasinha’s town: colon cancer, breast cancer, alopecia; Piepzna-Samarasinha herself became disabled. Her mother contracted cancer because of contact with this water. They did not “survive” but were instead “forever scarred” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, para 4, 2009). Indeed, the people of Worcester were, to use Piepzna-Samarasinha’s (2009 words, “sick and fucked up for no good reason” (para 6). Hearing this story, I was struck by disgrace. It is disgraceful, shameful, and abhorrent that the people of an industrial town could be understood as disposable and, as a result, their land, as well are their bodies, be so uncared for. Hearing Piepzna-Samarasinha’s monologue, I also struggled. My mind struggled not to make the leap that would land me into thinking that the sickness and disability that resulted from such gross neglect was disgraceful too. This is not a comfortable place in which to land; for me, disability is always prideful even when it rubs shame. For me, disability is certainly not the experience of being “sick and fucked up for no good reason” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, para 6, 2009). But this is how it was
represented in this monologue, and I understand how it could be framed as such.

Touching bad water that the government will not clean up is an instance of environmental racism; it is not a “good reason” to become disabled and sick (Piepzna-Samarasinha, para 6, 2009). It may be, indeed, “fucked up” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, para 6, 2009). And my disability politic, which understands disability as desired life, a communal bind, and creative inspiration, tells me that there is a possibility that a disability that arose from this disgraceful situation is not, itself, a disgrace. This story, although it may be uncomfortable, is not a “dumb” one and we should want to hear it.

As new stories of disability and debility bubble up, we should assume that disability studies will attend to them, rather than the opposite, however uncomfortable they may be. With this discussion, I am following up on my assertion that I wish not to scold disability studies for its lacking attention to different stories of difference but instead to demonstrate how this discipline and this politic are already opening up. These debilities mark the ongoingness of structural inequalities; the tie between discourse and materiality securely bound. Disability arose out of debility as did sickness, illness, and environmental inquiry: these are all differences that make a difference, much like their racialized and classed differences which produced them as a disposable population. And these differences are storied. Piepzna-Samarasinha (2009) stories her difference and the debility that arose in her town as the experience of being “sick and fucked up for no good reason” (para 6). Perhaps, like Puar, Piepzna-Samarasinha turned to the disability movement with her stories of debility; debility, the experience of which is not exclusive to disability, brought her in.
Disability studies is very familiar with different stories of disability; this discipline is committed to creating, telling, listening to, and making room for stories in which disability appears as something other than an individual problem in need of a solution. As a disability studies scholar who is committed to seeking disability rights and justice, I am deeply committed to sharing and seeking out different stories of disability. These stories are foundational for my disability politic, of which enacting crip communities is a part, for they help to form my claim that disability is not a problem but, rather, can be a desired life, a communal bind, a source of creative inspiration. And I recognize Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story as a different story of difference. Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story of the entanglement of geography and disability shapes and is shaped by disability. Her story—a story of the connection between the land and bodies—released a new meaning of disability into the world. Indeed, drawing on Michalko’s work previously discussed, Piepzna-Samarasinha’s story illuminates, rather than hides, “the difference that disability makes” (Michalko, 2002).

Disability studies and its politic is a productive place to turn to for its commitment to troubling normalcy, particularly when rethinking the bodily capacity/debility divide. Disability studies, with its foundations rooted within the act of opening up to different stories of difference, especially as it relates to troubling understandings of unlivable lives based on bodily, mental, and sensorial difference, is, I believe, open, ready, and already engaging the challenge of thinking through debility that Puar is posing to us… in a very considered way. One way to open up to this challenge—and there are many—is to turn to community. Specifically, we may open up to different stories of difference that may already be a part of us by understanding that a scopic, totalizing view of our
community—which may, to some extend, be necessary for any form of collectivizing—tricks us into thinking that we ‘know’ who we are, and therefore who we are not. I explore this trick as well as what I am calling ‘blinded knowledge’ in the next and concluding section.

“Blinded Knowledge”

As I make my suggestion that turning to community is one way to open up space for ‘different stories of difference’ in disability studies, let me return to my earlier thoughts on the entanglement of humanness and geography. Disabled and racialized people build community and engage in communifying practices in order to work out new ways of belonging and meaning together in the midst of an inhospitable geography which does not desire us as citizens. In this way, and given that community occurs in the normative terrain for it cannot possibly transcend it, creating and participating in community offers us ways to re-inscribe the land; these communifying practices have the potential to rework geography. So then, one possible way of attending to this chapter’s over-arching question—how do we open up to different stories of difference that may be troubling to disability studies—a question that, for me, emerged when I began to attend to the entanglement of disability and geography, may in fact lie in geography…namely, community.

Disability studies refers to ‘community’ a lot. Recently there are many special issues of journals and conferences relating to disability community; community is an oft-

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39 In many ways, the disability movement has already opened up to this challenge; I do not mean to imply that my proposal is novel; rather, I am entering into a conversation.
discussed topic on blogs and message boards discussions\textsuperscript{40}; in disability autobiographies and memoirs, disabled people, myself included (Chandler, 2009), often credit ‘the community’ with helping them discover disability pride, relate to their disability as an embodied identity, meet other disabled comrades, and become politicized. The disability community is also heavily critiqued: people who imagine themselves to be part of the disability community often call attention to who is being excluded from community; there is usually a caucus at the Society for Disability Studies conference, for example, that is unofficially dedicated to discussing ‘who is not here,’ which is usually identified to be poor people and people of colour.

These articulations, iterations, adorations, and critiques of disability community all have one thing in common, as far as I can tell: they all imagine disability community to be a ‘thing’ — a static ‘thing,’ a ‘knowable thing,’ a ‘thing’ that is inclusive of some and exclusive of others and we, the included, can ‘know’ who is being excluded. While I certainly do not mean to imply that excluding people of colour or poor people from our movement is admissible or should not be cause for deep thought, I do want to consider that, perhaps, our figuration of ‘community’ as a taken-for-granted static ‘thing’ which is inclusive/exclusive may not be the most useful framework because it could cause us to miss the ways that crip community is already being enacted. I propose that as we think about crip community, its possibilities and promises, we may need to ‘crip’ community.

\textsuperscript{40} Recent examples of these kinds of community discussions about who disability communities include and exclude can be found in the November 2013 disability politic posts on the website Feminist wire, including Mark Sherry’s post Crip politics? Just….no. (23 November, 2013) and the robust and heated online response this post garnered; Mia Mingus’s blog Leaving evidence (February, 2011); Stacy Melburne’s now defunct blog, cripchick weblog (3 December, 2008); and the discussions and panels generated in response to the 2011 Society for Disability Studies conference’s theme Collaborations, Cultures, and Collaborations. I include these examples as evidence of ongoing (perhaps necessary) discussions of the dynamics of crip community not to set them up for critique, but rather as representations of the way much of these discussions are framed. I am suggesting that it might be productive to add to the mix more nuanced discussions generated through “grounded knowledges” of crip community (de Certeau, 1984).
For this, I use crip as a verb: To crip is to open up desire for what disability disrupts (Fritsch, 2012). As mentioned, I also recall McRuer’s (2014) updated use of the word ‘crip’ to mean to “expose ways in which bodies, minds, and impairments that should be at the absolute centre of a space or issue or discussion get ‘purged’ (Tongson) from that space or issue or discussion…” . ‘Crippling,’ then—an example of the work that disability does, or following Michalko (2006), demonstrative of the way disability can teach—is a process of undoing and remaking meaning that can be applied in any area of critical work; it need not be disability specific. ‘Crippling’ requires us to attend to the ways bodies, minds, and impairments get purged from the discussion while at the same time productively disrupt the assumption that we ‘know’ who and how people become purged. I think that criping community—a productive project as much as it is destructive—thinking through different stories of difference, stories which may historically have been de-centered in our movement, requires us to relinquish the idea that ours is a community that has a knowable whole.

To think through what I am naming a ‘blinded knowledge’ and different ways of knowing our community, I turn to de Certeau, whose discussion of different ways of knowing usefully turns on its head the adage that sight equals knowledge that has been with us since the enlightenment. Throughout this section, I articulate ‘blinded knowledge’ as a productive way of knowing community that is unique to those of us who are enacting it. ‘Knowing’ crip community through being in it also requires one to be in

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41 Updated from his 2001 book *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability.*
42 Please also see my extensive discussion of how I am framing the work of criping community laid out throughout chapter one, particularly pages 24-27.
normative terrain, for this is a terrain community can rework but not transgress. The vantage point of being on the ground of community, itself a contradictory position, is similar to the position James describes as he speaks about how people of the diaspora are in the unique position to offer critique of a culture that they are, at once, apart from and a part of (James, 1984, cited in Mercer, 1994, p. 5). In his discussion de Certeau (1984) distinguishes between the “voyeurs” who have a “scopic view” of the city and the “practitioners of the down below,” who create the movements of the city but whose proximity to the ground makes them blind to the movements they create (pp. 250-252). I think de Certeau’s (1984) discussion of the relationship between the “voyeurs” and the “practitioners of the down below” is useful for thinking about the relationship between, and the space in between, a totalizing perspective of the crip community and the “down below” where practices, spaces, and places of alterity are enacted (p. 249). De Certeau (1984) tells us that voyeurs gain a totalizing view of the city, which turns the space into a “knowable” set of systems and practices, a knowing that is dependent upon the voyeur to remove themself from the busyness of the ground, obtaining an elevated viewpoint from places such as rooftop patios and viewing decks on top of high rises (p. 249). Of this desire to “know” the city, which emerged from the modernist notion that things are wholly “knowable”, de Certeau (1984) wonders:

What is the source of this pleasure of ‘seeing the whole’, of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts. [Their] elevation transfigures [them] into a voyeur. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar eye, looking down like a god. The fiction of
knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more. (p. 250)

Here, de Certeau is suggesting that a scopic view may appear to give us totalizing understanding of a knowable whole. I would add that this way of knowing can be used to describe relationships with social movements, just as de Certeau describes a relationship with cities. However, when we remove ourselves from the “down below”— removing ourselves from the geographic spaces of sidewalks, cafes, classrooms, galleries, bathrooms, and similar urban and rural crevasses—in order to obtain a totalizing account of what it is we are doing and who it is that we are, our scopic view may trick us into thinking that things like cities and social movements are totally knowable when this knowledge is, following de Certeau (1984), fictitious, “related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more” (p. 250). The understanding that this viewpoint brings with it complete knowledge is fallacy, indeed, but this knowledge is not wholly discountable. I maintain my assertion that a scopic view is necessary, at times, but it becomes dangerous when this sort of knowledge is understood as complete in itself. This fiction of knowledge that the vantage point of the “solar eye” permits turns the world—or community—into a “text” which can be possessed (de Certeau, 1984, p. 250). Such possession of crip community allows us to make claims such as, ‘I am aware of who is not here.’ This act of pointing out exclusion is pleasurable, much like the way of seeing that allows for it, as de Certeau describes. In the same way, the pleasure of pointing out ‘who is not here’ is different than the pleasures of being in community, a pleasure of discovering who is here through encountering and engaging different stories of difference when we move about on the ground with a desire to find such stories, discoveries only
possible from a position of intimate proximity. The pleasures of ‘blinded knowledge’ are
the pleasures of community which are distinct from the pleasures of pointing, a practice
associated with knowing community ‘totally’ from a scopic perspective. Indeed, a lust for
knowing community as ‘whole’ is different from the lust for being in community; a
community structured around the desire for disability, as I will discuss in chapter four.
The fiction of such scopic, totalizing knowledge comes from the identification of this
knowledge as complete, rather than partial, knowledge complete in nothing but vision,
nothing but perspective. The ‘view’ we obtain from such a vantage point is not wholly
discernable, and it is certainly pleasurable, but it is incomplete. That we understand this
view from above as complete knowledge—knowing completed in and by sight—tells us
something about how we understand knowing, an understanding that is important to
consider in this discussion of knowing crip community and all of its inclusions and
exclusions. That we (think we) know complete knowledge is located in sight—
specifically sight obtained through one’s removal from the “ground below”—tells us that
knowledge is not obtained through practice, through touch, through being in community.
This is an ontological orientation I wish to disrupt, a necessary disruption on which I
follow through in the next chapter when I engage people’s stories of being in community
as told to me in interviews.

In contrast to the “scopic view” only obtainable by lifting oneself off of the
ground, de Certeau (1984) tells us that the ordinary practitioners of the “down below”
live below the threshold at which visibility begins (p. 251). According to de Certeau,
blurred focus (blind of the “whole”, what I am naming ‘blinded knowledge’), which only
comes from an intimate proximity achieved from a position on the ground, may be
necessary for keeping things moving in the realm of the down below. The practitioners of the down below make use of spaces that cannot be seen, we write a text without being able to read it (de Certeau, 1984, p. 250). And in this way, our knowledge of the spaces we occupy and the texts we write is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms […] for in our practices we elude legibility (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 250-251). We gain a ‘blinded knowledge’ of community, and intimate though perhaps, at times, ineffable understanding of it through the ‘blinded knowledge’ that is achieved by being on the ground, in closer proximity to community, a proximity that is produced out of our desire for community. I am not suggesting that this ‘blinded knowledge’ is more ‘true’ than knowledge obtained by a ‘scopic view.’ A ‘blinded knowledge,’ too, is an incomplete knowledge…. But, nonetheless, a knowledge which is contributory to our cultural imaginary of what crip community ‘is.’ For only through a shared imagination can we know community, just as only through desire can we produce crip community, much like the way that through desire is the only way that we can produce crip community, as I explore in chapter four.

Throughout his chapter, de Certeau (1984) references a plaque mounted in the lobby of the World Trade Centre inscribed with the words: *It’s hard to be down when you’re up.* We could lift ourselves up to gain an imaginary, fictitious universal eye, offering a critique of our community and its scholarship for its exclusions. It is necessary to reflect and to totalize with a scopic eye, but is it useful to escape the “strangeness of the everyday” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 252)? De Certeau suggests not. Here we understand that scopism can cause us to miss the pleasures of community, the pleasures of being so close that our experience falls outside of the realm of sense-making or even articulation;
it eludes legibility. These pleasures are part of the “strangeness of the everyday” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 252). Might we instead consider the pleasures of “living below the threshold of visibility,” full of ‘blinded knowledge,’ engaging in the process of reading an urban text, the text of our movement, without being able to read it (de Certeau, 1984, p. 251)? This is the pleasure of enacting community in the realm of the “down below” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 251). When we work only in the realm of the scopic and elide the ‘blinded knowledge’ of the “down below”—a move necessary for making scopic claims about ‘who is not here’—we miss the individual communal enactments that make up our community, like the enactment between the man, my high-heeled boots, and me, which opened chapter one.

De Certeau’s description of the scopic perspective as an inhibiter to knowledge rather than an indicator of it, or metaphor for it, is useful for addressing the potential implications of being wholly occupied with obtaining a scopic viewpoint of our movement in order to give its account for only who it excludes. This distinction between what de Certeau (1984) describes as “the fiction of knowledge” (obtained from the scopic) and what I describe as ‘blinded knowledge’ (obtained “below the threshold of sight,” (p. 250) following de Certeau’s articulation) is also important when we are thinking about how our movement attends to different stories of difference. When I am naming Piepzna-Samarasinha’s (2009) story as a different story of difference, I want to be very clear that I am doing so from a position of ‘blinded knowledge’ rather than a scopic vantage point. I am not suggesting that her story is unfamiliar to disability studies; I am saying that this story is unfamiliar to me. Piepzna-Samarasinha identifies as being part of our movement and her story is obviously very familiar to her and probably to
those around her. When I am opening up to her story, recognizing it as a different story of
difference, I am attempting to open up to the disruption her story causes me, to centralize
stories that have previously been marginalized by our movement from where I sit.

I think there are already stories being told, and our community is being worked
and reworked, in ways that are not apparent, for a totalizing, “scopic” understanding of
our community is not possible. I propose that we must proceed with two connected sets
of knowledges. We need to approach crip community from a scopic vantage point some
of the time; a totalizing understanding of our collective is necessary. For example, we
must anticipate, expect, and hope for disability when planning communal events. This
requires the scopic knowledge that wheelchair users, blind folks, D/deaf folks are part of
us and will show up and therefore, we must ethically commit to making our events as
accessible as possible. In other words, even if we do not know if a D/deaf person will
come to an event, we must rely on our scopic understanding that they are part of us and
our welcoming of them must be anticipatory. We should therefore have American Sign
Language (ASL) interpreters in place. If we only relied on our ‘blinded knowledge,’ we
may not think a D/deaf person would be at our events if we did not know this directly and
consequently we would not plan for their arrival. However, this scopic view also tricks us
into thinking that we know community… totally (de Certeau, 1984). We must sometimes
act with a scopic understanding, but we must do so with the understanding that this
totalizing sight tricks us, it may provide a, “knowledge of fiction” (de Certeau, 1984, p.
250). If and when we get the impression that we know who ‘we’ are and therefore who
‘we’ are not, we must remember that ‘sight’, in the scopic sense, gives us not knowledge
but an impression. We must embrace the ‘blinded knowledge’ that comes from being on
the ground, inhabiting an intimate proximity to community (de Certeau, 1984). Herein lies the pleasure of being in community. We cannot name who is included and who is excluded through ‘blinded knowledge’ holistically (although we may feel inclusion and exclusions on the ground.) However, such “situated knowledge” which comes from an individual perspective while acknowledging the collective, gives us a pleasure indicative of belonging to and working with community (Haraway, 1988).

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The end of chapter two articulated the need for the crip community to open up to ‘different stories of difference;’ I explained the potential dangers of interpreting community only from a scopic view. This vantage point obscures our knowledge of the “down below” (deCerteau, 1984) and from above, we can typically only tell a “single story” of the crip community, which are “dangerous,” as Adiche (2009) reminds. It is not as though single stories are untrue, Adiche suggests. Recall what King (2001) tells us about stories, “The truth about stories is that that is all we are” (p. 1). Trouble comes when we mistake a single story for the whole or the only story. And this is an easy mistake to make. Stories that get mistaken for the story, the truth, are often easy stories to tell and to hear and they are easily consumed, even “pleasurable” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 250). Opening up to many stories—uncomfortable and contrasting stories—can be more difficult to hear and to tell. This chapter demonstrates that opening up to many stories will lead to a more dynamic sense/“sensibility” (Titchkosky, 2008) of community. To avoid getting caught up in the “pleasure of seeing the whole” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 250),
and to resist the re-telling of a “single story,” as Adiche (2009) cautions, this chapter makes meaning of crip communities through telling and thinking about stories from the “down below” (de Certeau, 1984). These are stories of community that may be missed if we interpret community from a scopic view (an interpretation that may easily be mistaken for a ‘knowing.’) None of these stories offer an empirical truth; instead, thinking about these stories together with our own experience of community brings a collective understanding to a collective experience.

Maps and Stories

Working with Walcott’s words (2003), and reflecting on the analysis put forth in this chapter, the history of where disabled people and racialized people are placed reveals an entangled history of being contained in geographies in which they both belong and do not belong. Through the fifteenth and sixteenth century, racialized bodies were contained in, but did not belong in, slave ships. Through this travel from Africa to North America across the middle passage, they arrived in a new land in which they were understood as belonging as enslaved laborers on plantations and in slave quarters but not belonging as liberated people on normative terrain. Contained in North America, these people of the African diaspora could never return to their homeland; they no longer belonged in Africa, either. At the same time, in similar and overlapping ways, disabled people both belonged and did not belong where they were geographically contained in ships of fools in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and later, into the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century freak shows and asylums. The understanding where disabled people belonged in these liminal, transient geographies produced them as stateless bodies. There
was much cultural investment in these particular geographic placements for the way they calibrated and normalized where, and therefore who, disabled and racialized people are (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi). Into the nineteenth century, these geographies of abnormalcy—which made the people contained within them into bodies of abnormalcy, at the same time as these bodies made the spaces themselves abnormal—worked to assure people in other spaces, spaces of normalcy (the normative terrain, as I refer to it throughout this work) that they are ‘normal’ (Voronka, 2008; Foucault, 2008). However, if we trust McKittrick’s (2006) insights, we know that the meaning of geography is never fixed; the rules of the terrain are always alterable (p. x). We can infuse the spaces we find ourselves in with different meaning. I suggest that this spatial reworking occurs through enactments of crip community, produced out of a desire for disability, thusly, unworking and reworking its meaning.

Taking seriously the complexity of the connection between disability and the environment, as Kafer (2013) would have us do, requires us to think through how the discursive meaning of disability is, in part, produced through geography but disability is also materially produced through geography. When we attend to disabling environments, as Erevelles’s (2011a) work points us to, the links between globalization, ongoing colonialism, race, class, and the production of disability become strong (p. 18). According to the 2006 UN Report Erevelles (2011a) and Grech (2012) cite in their work, 80% of the world’s 650 million disabled people live in the global south. In large part, in the global south, disability is brought on by war and postwar conflict, poverty, hunger, pollution, and other environmental hazards (Erevelles, 2011a, p. 18). These are different stories of disability. These are stories of disability that disrupts disability identity politics’
main tenets in a few ways. Like disability caused by environmental racism, thought through in this chapter using Piepzna-Samarasinha’s river story, disability caused by war and postwar conflict in the global south may bring a person closer to death not because disability signifies loss of life, but because of factors such as unhealthy living conditions, inadequate healthcare, and geographic distance from accessing healthcare (Erevelles, 2011a, p. 18). Relatedly, these stories disrupt the idea that when we attend to the cause of disability, we always locate the problem of disability in the individual rather than the social, thus depoliticizing its production (Erevelles, 2011b, p. 123.) These stories also disrupt the notion that disability can, and should be, an embodied identity that unquestionably connects us to other disabled people and unquestionably connects us to discourses, politics, and communities of disability pride.

We may never be able to achieve a totalizing, scopic understanding of disability community (de Certeau, 1984). I recognize that stories of disability community are vast and, at the same time, I also recognize that there may be different stories of difference in our midst to which we are hesitant to attend… stories of disability and globalization are risky. When we collapse or do not attend the differences these differential circumstances make to the ways that disability and normalcy are made to matter—historically and globally (e.g., Molina’s analysis of the desirable Mexican immigrant with tuberculosis)—we run the risk of normalizing disability in disability studies and building and recognizing crip communities and our members with normative understanding of disability in mind. For, as Grech (2012) writes, “That we know people through their stories [and] ignoring bodies means making the stories emanating from them invisible [sic]” (p. 63). My commitment to thinking through the ongoing, imbricated geographies
of racialized and disabled people and the entangled ways that these geographies produce us as both desirable and undesirable to the production of normalcy within global capitalism and neoliberal terms, requires me to think through what and how different stories of difference emerge from within the rub of colonialism, globalization, and the production of disability.

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Reflecting back on Solnit’s (2010) work that I presented at the beginning of this chapter, we find our place in land through stories. We bring collective sense to the land we share through stories. There are many ways to story—and give sense to—the land. This chapter has offered quite a few. Paying philosophic attention to the land we find ourselves on, following Kafer’s direction (2013), gives us a “different sense of place” (Brand, 2009). I do not offer these stories as a way of telling the ‘truth’ of the land. Rather, following King (2003), I seek to uncover different senses of the land, stories that may have been elided by geographic stories with “more place or purchase” (p. 22) by thinking about how race and disability give shape to these stories (Garland-Thomson, 2007). Thinking with Piepzna-Samarasinha and Puar, geographic stories, too, shape how we experience, thus story, disability. Within the way that disability is culturally produced, it is geopolitically produced, as this chapter demonstrates.

I take all of these ways that disability is storied through the land—stories of belonging and unbelonging—as I move forward in my next two chapters. Following the ‘groundwork’ laid out in this chapter, my next two chapters think about how disability is
storied through place, and they way that place contributes to how we story disability, in
the specific geographic site of a university campus. I chose this site because as someone
who spends much of her time on university campuses, this is where I feel a robust sense
of unbelongingness as I frequently encounter ableist ambushes. I also feel a sense of
belongingness through unsteady and fleeting encounters with disability communities and
also what I eventually come to call enactments of crip community. These two chapters
engage stories generated in interviews with people who identify as being a part of
disability communities housed on campus. These interviews speak to the strange
pleasures of being in community, some of which are not necessarily pleasurable, all of
the time (1984). With this chapter, I demonstrate that while there are lots of ways of
knowing community, the way I am most interested is through stories of the “down
below” (1984).

The geography of this university campus, like all geographies, is infused with
ways of knowing disability, a meaning-making process which, as I will demonstrate in
these next two chapters, effects how disability—and, thus, the space—feels. These
feelings generated through the space have everything to do with how we know the space.
And as we story the space through our feelings, we bring new understandings of the
space, as these next two chapters also demonstrate. In this way, stories are spatially
productive, producing new ways of knowing space.
Chapter Three: Stories from the Down Below

It’s hard to be down when you’re up.

--- Plaque from the World Trade Centre as quoted in de Certeau, 1984

The danger of ‘single stories’ is not that they are untrue, but that they collapse the diversity of human experience.

--- Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, 2009

The end of chapter two articulated the need for the crip community to open up to ‘different stories of difference;’ I explained the potential dangers of interpreting community only from a scopic view. This vantage point obscures our knowledge of the “down below” (deCerteau, 1984) and from above, we can typically only tell a “single story” of the crip community, which are “dangerous,” as Adiche (2009) reminds. It is not as though single stories are untrue, Adiche suggests. Recall what King (2001) tells us about stories, “The truth about stories is that that is all we are” (p. 1). Trouble comes when we mistake a single story for the whole or the only story. And this is an easy mistake to make. Stories that get mistaken for the story, the truth, are often easy stories to tell and to hear and they are easily consumed, even “pleasurable” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 250). Opening up to many stories—uncomfortable and contrasting stories—can be more difficult to hear and to tell. This chapter demonstrates that opening up to many stories will lead to a more dynamic sense/“sensibility” (Titchkosky, 2008) of community. To avoid getting caught up in the “pleasure of seeing the whole” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 250),
and to resist the re-telling of a “single story,” as Adiche (2009) cautions, this chapter makes meaning of crip communities through telling and thinking about stories from the “down below” (de Certeau, 1984). These are stories of community that may be missed if we interpret community from a scopic view (an interpretation that may easily be mistaken for a ‘knowing.’) None of these stories offer an empirical truth; instead, thinking about these stories together with our own experience of community brings a collective understanding to a collective experience.

In this chapter I think with stories which emerged within my interviews that explore how community is known through how it is felt. I begin by describing how I follow Susan Dion’s work put forth in the book *Braiding Histories: Learning from Aboriginal Peoples*. Dion suggests that we might think about how stories are produced together between the storyteller and the story-listener through shared acts of interpretation rather than understand stories as empirically owned by the teller or its meaning empirically derived from the listener/researcher. I continue to explore how I derive meaning from these stories through the act of interpretation as a listener by describing how I attend to the grammar of the ways we ‘know’ community which appears in stories about community, drawing on Van Manen’s work. I want to frame this discussion by suggesting that we might orient to these stories not as ‘truth-holders,’ but as gestures towards new possibilities, specifically, new possibilities for living together. I respond to the “compelling invitation” stories offer and use the remainder of this chapter to think with the stories told to me through interviews about how we might rethink and rework the meaning of disability through community (Fredlander, cited in Dion, 2009, p. 17). In this exploration, I pay particular attention to how people describe feeling a
sense/sensibility of belongingness within these structured communities or, in other words, how people ‘know’ community through feeling it.

**Listening to Stories: A “Compelling Invitation”**

As I began to think about how I was going to narrate the experience of being in community, it became clear that I needed to have conversations with other people who identified as being a part of disability community. Being in community is a collective experience. Experiencing space and time as being in community rather than being ‘passing through’ requires one to attend to community as community, for without such attention, community is not so, as this dissertation explicates at length. Constituting something as community rather than another kind of social arrangement requires one to frame the social in a particular way, namely one that acknowledges the collective. For all of these reasons, community is a collective experience, the experience of being part of a collective. And so, I knew I needed to bring collective sense to a collective experience; I could not write about community only from the position of where I sit. There are many ways in which to generate collective knowledge. Stories are always social; even the stories I tell—my stories—are always an expression of togetherness. For this work, I wanted to engage stories from people with whom I may not be in community, which is why I chose to conduct interviews. These were carried out as conversations, each of us offering bit from out own experience, together generating stories of community.
Following the argument presented in chapter two, the meaning that geographic space is infused with helps to make legible the people within it. Although the university is likely not anyone’s permanent home, just as no home is permanent, the meaning that this geography is infused with has much to do with the shifting meaning made of people within this space. In her article, “To Pee or Not to Pee: Ordinary Talk about Extraordinary Exclusion,” Titchkosky (2008) attends to some of the “everyday sensibilities” (p. 42) that make possible the extraordinary exclusion of disabled people from university life. In this article, Titchkosky (2008, p. 43) traces a line of inquiry into how the third largest building on one of Canada’s largest university campus did not, until 2008, have a barrier-free washrooms becomes justifiable and made ordinary. When Titchkosky inquires about why there is not an accessible washroom, everyone from professors, school administrators, and people in charge of buildings and grounds, told her that this was because there was not anyone who needed to use an accessible washroom attending the university. This extraordinary exclusion made ordinary is an example of the co-constitutive work of ableist logic and disabling practices as outlined in footnote 50. It also is an example of the kind of meaning disabled people are attributed with—“excludible types” (Titchkosky, 2008) — at the university. We are told that we are excludable in a number of ways: by the inaccessible geographies of buildings and grounds; syllabi without accessibility statements and professors, classroom dynamics, and assignments that do not welcome in disability; lack of seating for folks using mobility devices and inaccessible lecterns, are also geographic reminders that it is not imagined that disability will show up… and when it does, it will be rendered nothing more or less than a “problem in need of solution” (Snyder & Mitchell, 1997, p. 42). Such
meaning produced out of geography. As a student and course instructor at the university, I am very familiar with the feeling of being produced as excludible by and through the university geography. I also know that, sometimes, becoming a part of disability communities changes the way the university feels. It is these experiences that drew me into attending to the geography of the university as my site of inquiry in which to seek out stories about how disability communities are and are not enacted and, ultimately, how these enactments feel.

I chose to recruit participants who identified as being part of a disability community at the University of Toronto (U of T), in part because this is one of the places where I experience the enactment of community with some frequency and in part because of the ableism and disableism which circulate within the geographic site of the university campus, I thought it would be interesting and useful to my project to think about how community emerges in ways that confirms and disrupts such logic and practices. I wanted to talk to people who identified as being part of both organizationally structured and instructed communities as a way to think about the interaction between structures and the community generated within them.

My participants identified as belonging to Best Buddies, Accessibility Services, and a student-run disability group because these were the disability communities that I recognized as being as prominent on campus44. I sent around recruitment emails (appendix A) to these organizations and interviewed the first person who responded. I also recruited people who identified as being part of unstructured disability communities

44 I received approval to conduct these interviews from the Ethics Review Board at U of T and I followed proper research protocol when recruiting participants, interviewing, and storing the interview material (see appendices D-F). All four research participants gave informed consent (see appendix B) and they have been made anonymous within this work.
by sending emails around U of T disability studies listervs. One participant, Melissa⁴⁵, identifies as a nondisabled member of U of T’s chapter of “Best Buddies,” a program that pairs nondisabled university students with disabled ‘buddies’ non-university students. Another participant, Anna, identifies as having a learning disability, is registered with U of T’s Accessibility Services, and is a participant in their peer-mentorship program. Geoff identifies as disabled and living with addiction in recovery and as a member of an unstructured crip community at U of T as well as a member of various Toronto chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Sandra identifies as blind and as a member of a disability advocacy student group on campus as well as a member of unstructured crip communities at U of T and in Toronto. Geoff responded to this recruitment email identifying as belonging to an unstructured community consisting mostly of people he met through organizing and attending disability cultural events on campus. Geoff also identified as belonging to AA and NA communities, which is what he spoke about for the most part in his interview. And so, I did not actively seek out members of AA and NA communities, mainly because I did not recognize them as disability communities before talking to Geoff, a discussion of these communities entered into this work through Geoff. As is evident throughout my discussion of this field work, my analysis does not offer a critique of these organizations—how they are structured, their membership, and the communifying practices they foster—per se, although, as my analysis demonstrates, I am critical of some of these communities. Rather, I am more interested in interrogating these geographic spaces as places were disability community is and is not enacted.

⁴⁵ All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.
Upon recruiting my participants, they each came to my office at U of T for one-hour interviews. Before the interview I explained to my participants the aim of my research, that I received ethics approval to conduct the interview, and explained how I would be using the interview data and that they could opt-out as participants in my research any time before my dissertation was submitted. In these interviews/conversations, I identified as a member of various crip communities to my participants and I shared my own stories of experiencing community in the interviews. I identified with, related to, was surprised by, and was challenged by the stories the participants told me during their interviews. They responded similarly to my stories. Together, in the interviews, we created new stories of disability and even, perhaps, generated moments of community. Attending to the pedagogical possibilities of stories, learning from them, within a narrative inquiry requires us to recognize that stories are charged with meaning-making potential.

Dion explores how the act of telling stories pedagogically works to reshape representations of Aboriginal people in Canada, specifically stories told about Aboriginal people within the colonial spaces of residential school classrooms, Dion (1999) writing that, “stories provid[e] me with a sense of belonging and purpose, an understanding of my connections” (p. 15). This resonates with the stories I will put forth in this chapter; as much as the storyteller was telling me stories of crip communities in which disability was desired, these stories provided me, the listener, with a sense of belonging, even a sense of my communal connections as someone who desires disability and as a disabled person who desires to meet others who share in this desire, even to know that there are others who desire disability with whom my paths have not (yet) crossed. This, again, points to
the sociality of stories from which new meanings emerge as well as the dynamic connection between storyteller and story-listener. Dion’s (1999, p. 17) work describes and exemplifies how we can orient to stories as providing a “compelling invitation” to rethinking the meanings we make of bodies in space. Similarly, in this work on community, stories provide a “different sense of place” (Brand, 1999). I follow Dion’s work as a way of thinking through how these stories were generated between my participants, the teller, and me, the listener, with a discussion of how the act of telling stories and listening to stories can serve as a pedagogy of “becoming,” (Rice, 2014) that is, stories provide us with possibilities for what community is as well as the experience of being in community could become. These stories and the possibilities for new ways of living together they gesture towards, teach in a way that is not instructive but, rather, indeterminate and non-didactic (Rice, 2014).

Of the importance of listening, Dion writes, “Within Aboriginal culture it is understood that listeners will know what is expected from them in the storyteller-listener relationship” (1999, p. 16). Drawing on a report made by the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (Canada, 1996), Dion (1999) says,

There is an assumption that the teller of the story is so much a part of the event being described that it would be arrogant to presume to classify or categorize the event exactly or for all of time. Those who hear the oral accounts draw their own conclusions from what they have heard, and they do so in the particular context (time, place, situation) of the telling. Thus the meaning to be drawn from an oral account depends on who is telling it,
the circumstances in which it is being told, and the interpretation the
listener gives to what has been heard. p. 16.

Dion’s discussion describes the role of the listener in the act of storytelling in a way that is consistent with the principles of narrative inquiry. The ‘teller’ and the ‘listener’ are positioned in relation to one another, each playing an integral role in how meaning is made through storytelling. The ‘teller’ describes the event and their description is not regarded as holding the ‘truth’ of the event, but, rather, they are setting an interpretive scene at the same time as they are extending an invitation to the listener to meet them in the act of interpretation. The meaning derived from this interpretive exchange between ‘teller’ and ‘listener’ is not static or ahistorical; rather, it is mediated by the positionality of each—the time, place, and situation. The meaning made of stories is clearly generated together, between teller, listener, and in the midst of the social world. In the interviews I conducted, which generated the stories coming up, the teller—the research participant—the listener—you and me—as well as the context in which the stories were told—in interviews about community directed by a specific set of questions—all contribute to the meaning of these stories. Their meanings, therefore, will never be fixed.

Consider this brief excerpt from my interview with one of my participants, Geoff who identifies as disabled, as an addict, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and various unstructured disability communities at U of T and in Toronto more generally—he is the teller and I am the listener. I begin my interview with Geoff by asking him to describe some of the communities of which he is a part. In his response he talked for quite a while about his experience in both AA and NA communities, which he identifies as disability communities. In his initial description of
these communities Geoff uses the word ‘feeling’ a lot to describe how he experiences community. He describes “feeling welcome” at these meetings and “feeling different, too, because I was 19 [younger than the rest of the group].” I responded by saying, “I’m really interested in how everyone describes community as a feeling.” In response to this comment, Geoff described how members of the AA and NA community are “suppose to be working with a higher power…”. From discussing the spiritual characteristic of the AA and NA meetings, Geoff addressed the collective spirit in the meetings, which lead into a generative discussion of community. As Geoff describes,

[…]A lot of people first identify, and I did too, with having a higher power that was sort of, like, relating to, like, the spirit of the room, or, like, the collectiveness within the rooms.

Further along in the interview, Geoff picks up this thread again saying that he feels dedicated to staying sober as part of his commitment to this collective.

In this interview, I was presented with a “compelling invitation” (Dion, 1999, p. 17) to think through the experience and meaning of community. This is Geoff’s story about community but he does not hold any sort of empirical ‘truth’ about this social situation. Through sharing it with me, Geoff is inviting me to participate in an act of shared meaning-making. I have never experienced the particular communifying event of attending an AA or an NA meeting. I have, however, experienced community. I was not intending to opening up a discussion of spirituality with my comment about the ways we feel community and I would not have expected this discussion to change so quickly into a discussion of collective responsibility and then, soon after, to community. But it did. I do not know if Geoff had previously related the spirituality of the meeting with the way he
felt community, or a collective responsibility, in these meetings. But, in this interview, provoked by my observed interest in how we feel community, he made this connection. Together we—storyteller and story listener—made this meaning.

The storyteller, Dion (1999) writes, must, “(re)tell in such a way that listeners hear a ‘compelling invitation’ that claims their attention and initiates unsettling questions…” (p. 17). Working with the stories of community that were generated within my interviews, I hope to extend a compelling invitation, initiating unsettling questions. As a listener to these stories, I find them to breathe new meaning into my understanding of community.

Within my discussion of these interviews, I loosely follow my figuration of crip community laid out in chapter one, which suggests that one way of interrogating community is by attending to the configuration of community members, community practices, and community investments. These stories are nuanced, messy, and, at times, even contradictory. By piecing together an understanding of community through grounded knowledge as told through many stories, I avoid the pleasure of knowing the whole, a fictitious, knowledge obtained from a scopic viewpoint (de Certeau, 1984), a singular knowledge that causes us to miss the nuances of who ‘we’ are and how we live together. As I explained, I do not offer these stories as a way to tell the truth about community, but, rather, to extend a “compelling invitation” (Dion, 1999, p. 17) to the reader, the story-listener, to engage in the interpretive act of meaning-making about the ways of crip community through these many stories.
Generating Stories

From a phenomenological perspective, to do research, through listening to stories, is to always question the way we experience the world, to want to know about the world in which we live as human beings (Van Manen, 1990, p. 54). And since to know the world is to profoundly be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching—questioning—is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to become of the world (Van Manen, 1990, p. 54). Van Manen (1990) also tells us that, “Phenomenological research always begins in the lifeworld, it attends to what is unique” (p. 54). “Attend[ing] to what is unique” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 54) about being in community, disability and crip community in particular, has meant for me, thus far, attending to feeling as a way of knowing community. I have described and theorized community by and through stories of my experiences of community, for, following Van Manen (1990), “My own life experiences are intimately accessible to me in a way that no one else’s are” (p. 54). For my discussion of these interviews, I use a hermeneutic phenomenology-informed method of critical inquiry (Van Manen 1990, p. 4) tells us that ‘hermeneutics’ describes the orientation toward making interpretive sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld in order to see pedagogical significance of situations and relations. ‘Phenomenology,’ Van Manen (1990, p. 4) continues, describes how one orients to lived experience. A hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, then, allows our research to ask questions about one’s experiences in everyday life, drawing meaning from the pre-reflective descriptions of such experiences rather than attempting to classify or abstract it, as is the goal of other sciences (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).
A hermeneutic phenomenological informed method of critical inquiry allows me to ask questions about the experience of community, an experience which, itself, is based on interpretation. To name an experience of crip community rather than, say, a moment of kindness unrelated to disability or disconnected from community, requires us to make a number of interpretive moves. One must operate with a certain set of assumptions. As examples, they must understand disability to be a socio-political phenomenon that appears between ourselves, each other, and the world rather than within individual bodies, minds, senses, and emotions gone wrong; they must embrace the possibility that disability could be desired alongside a recognition that the representation of disability as undesirable is pervasive in an ableist world. Qualifying a moment as a communal one, as my participants do, may also be structured by my interview questions, such as, ‘Have you ever been surprised by where you have or where you have not found the emergence of a sense of community?,’ and ‘What does disability community feel like to you?’ These questions come with and through the understanding that community may not be constant but, instead, could emerge and also disappear. These questions also suppose that community could be experienced through a feeling and that we might be able to experience community in a way that cannot be concretely described. These questions are reflective of phenomenological methodology as they are meant to access pre-reflective thought about how community is experienced (felt) in order to resist replicating what we know, or what we think we know, about this social phenomenon, particularly how it is structured.
For my discussion of these interviews, I also draw on “grounded theory methodology” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), particularly as it is used in feminist research (Clarke, 2005; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Keddy, Sims, & Stern, 1996) to gather together common themes as they appeared within and across the stories that were shared with me during these interviews. My recruitment script and interview questions (see appendices A and C) were developed with the intention of accessing stories about how participants felt or experienced community at U of T with the overall goal in this work to theorize how community is enacted and how feelings of belonging in community is achieved. In my analysis of these interviews, I am not attempting to bracket off my research intention. I read these transcriptions with my research interests held close and I recognize that this closeness affected they way I read these interviews, which becomes apparent in my discussion of these interviews.

46 I am not following the methodological traditions of grounding theory along strict lines. Rather, I am taking parts from grounded theory methodology where and when it is useful when working with my interviews. Grounded theory is particularly suited for such a mixed methods approach, in which it helps the researcher describe where and how “key discursive themes” (Clarke, 2005, p. 146) emerge in the narratives of the interview in combination with a hermeneutic method used to orient to the phenomena as it is described. Different from other qualitative methodologies, grounded theory was designed to create theories that were empirically derived from real-world situations gleaned from analyzing interviews (Oktay, 2012, p. 1). In other words, the analytic categories around which the researcher collects ideas from the interviews are not pre-determined; rather they are grounded in the discursive themes that emerge from the interview. In this way, in grounded theory research, data gathering and data analysis are done simultaneously by, at once, identifying and analyzing “key discursive themes” (Morse at al, 2009, p. 151). Identification and analysis must be done at the same time when using grounded theory because the researcher does not know what the “key discursive themes” are until she experiences the interviews and engages their transcripts (Clarke, 2005, p. 146; pp. 184-185). Feminist researchers who use this method make the case that grounded theory is particularly suited for research involving marginalized groups of people telling traditionally marginalized stories towards an emancipatory end because of its non-didactic approach of generating theories out of the research data rather than attempting to develop theory by fitting interview data into pre-determined categories for analysis (Clarke, 2005; Keddy, Sims, and Stern, 1996; Oktay, 2012, p. 5). As I use it, grounded theory helps me orient to my interviews by grounding my interpretation of my interviews in order to notice where themes emerge relative to other themes and as a way to notice which themes are common across my interviews. Once I identity these themes and where and how they appear, a hermeneutics approach allows me to go beyond what is described in order to discover meanings that are not immediately apparent in relation to my overall research project (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).
Aiming to continue to “attend to what is unique” (Van Manan, 1990, p. 54), I dwell in the “down below” (deCerteau, 1984), knowledges of community, as I turn to stories about community, specifically disability community experienced (or notably not experienced), stories told to me by my participants in our interviews together. The whole way through this dissertation, I treat stories as robust with meaning-making potential, particularly generative for producing new and multiplicitous ways of understanding the experience of disability and the experience of being in community with and through disability. Throughout this work, particularly in chapter five, I also attend to the ways that stories of crip community are also always already charged with the potential to produce community themselves, through telling and, drawing on Dion’s (1999) work, listening to these stories. And so, before attending to the stories generated in my interviews for their meaning-making potential, I say a few words about how I orient to stories methodologically.

In her chapter, “Broken Voices, Dirty Words: On the Productive Insufficiency of Voice,” Maggie MacLure discusses how the voices of interviewees, particularly those of marginalized people, have been used in qualitative research. Such voices, MacLure (2003, p. 139, as cited in MacLure, 2009, p. 98) suggests, have been used in research to create a “poetics of sincerity” that produces, “innocent voices that speak a familiar script of revelation or redemption or triumph, in tones that lack idiom or surprise (MacLure, 2009, p. 98). She continues to say that the problem of translating speech into writing is never surmountable (MacLure, 2009, p. 98). Indeed, there is a long history of disabled people’s voices [sic] becoming lost, not because they do not speak, or are made legible in other ways, but because they are not listened to. This work attends to the meaning-
making relationship between stories told and heard, following Dion (1999, p. 17) and it is not necessarily my research’s interest to uncover ‘authenticity’ or honour the ‘truth’ of these stories, understood to lie only in the intentions of the storyteller. I am thinking through stories as inviting a collective meaning-making process, which brings collective sense to a collective experience: being in community.

Patti Lather, in her chapter, “Against Empathy, Voice, and Authenticity” (2009), is seeking out a methodology that challenges a belief in, and a demand for, an ‘authentic voice’ in feminist research (p. 17). She wonders, “Can there be a research that refuses such grounds [of voice, authenticity, and empathy], residing in the messy ‘spaces in between where centers and margins are both situated and yet constantly changing intersections of interpretation, interruption, and mutuality?’” (2009, p. 17). In Lather’s (2009, p. 17) efforts to “de-familiarize common sentiments of […] authenticity and voice,” moving away from, “too-easy, too-familiar eating of the other,” and moving toward an ethic of “responsibility within indeterminacy” for presenting other people’s stories in research, I think she is opening up space for attending to storytelling and story-listening as collective meaning-making processes wherein both the storyteller and the story-listener has a shared responsibility (Dion, 1999) wherein one is not ‘eating the other’.

Returning to Garland-Thomson’s article, “Shapes Structures Story” discussed in chapter one, Bynum (2002) asks, “How can I be the same person I was a moment ago?” (as cited in Garland Thomson, 2007 p. 113). Addressing the impossibility engendered in this question, with story, Garland-Thomson (2007) writes, “Narrative is a way of constructing continuity over time. It is a coherent knitting of one moment to the next” (p.
Reading these two thoughts together offers much about the way I am using stories in this work. Given that, as Bynum (2002) questions, we are not the same person we were a moment ago—that we are always being and becoming temporarily produced, we do not necessarily, if ever, have a kernel of truth of ourselves to offer up to the world. In this way, the ‘authentic’ truth of my research participants’ experiences of community was not the aim of these interviews. Instead, again, following Garland-Thomson (2007, p. 122), I am ever-curious about the cultural work narratives do, an interest my research questions were based upon. Of narratives, Garland-Thomson (2007) writes, “They frame our understanding of raw, unorganized experiences, giving it coherent meaning and making it accessible to us through story” (p. 122). I do not imagine the framing work that stories do to be neutral or inconsequential. Attending to stories as cultural work that frames, or gives shape to, experience, as I do, is a different way to orient, indeed to value, stories that to orient to them as offering truths. The ways I story my own experiences do not—cannot—approximate the ‘authentic’ truth of a situation; my stories frame my experiences in a purposeful, though not necessarily explicit, way and in this way are reflective of my narrative commitments. The interview ‘data’ put forth in these two chapters are my stories of my research participants’ stories. And in this retelling, I am sure that something is “lost in translation” (McLure, 2009, p. 98). Orienting to stories not as incomplete approximations of truths but as a meaningful, collective, generative act of meaning-making between the storyteller and the story-listener, following Dion (1999) allows us to recognize that something is also changed and produced through the act of “capturing voice,” (McLure, 2009, p. 98) as I am doing here. Garland-Thomson (2007) also writes that, “By turning an experience into a narrative, we extend the experience of
being in a collective” (p. 122). In the pages that following I am offering to you, the collective audience, narratives that were generated between my participants and I about the experience of being in community, itself a collective experience. Together, we all produce, and produce again, the meanings these stories offer.

Telling stories of the stories told to me in my research interviews reflects my narrative commitments. I seek not to represent the ‘truth’ or ‘authentic’ voice of other people’s stories, nor do I understand these stories to be, strictly speaking and boundary setting, other people’s. Clearly guided by my desire to read these stories for the new understandings of community they produce, I offer a story of my participants’ stories framed in a particular way, for their meaning-making potential to enliven our collective understanding of a collective experience, being in community (my research desires were made explicit to my participants) and to propel these stories into a collective meaning-making process. And these stories become our stories. In giving these stories over to you, as they were given over to me, I invite you to become compelled to listen and tell your own stories. Together, we—storytellers, story-listeners, and story re-tellers, produce meaning. We may even produce community.

Communities as Structures and Feelings

To begin the interview, I asked participants to tell me a bit about their community and their involvement in it. The stories told to me in response to this initial question reveal that at the very moment we attempt to articulate community and our relation to it, we are trying to make sense of what community is. ‘What community is’ is not self-
evident and when we begin to think closely about community it becomes clear that we do not all necessarily have a shared understanding about what we mean by the word. Consider these two articulations of community and what belonging to community feels like, told to me by Sandra and Geoff in response to my opening question.

When I asked Sandra to tell me a little bit about the communities she is involved in, she began by framing what community means to her. “OK, so, um, the way that I am defining community is very contingent. It depends on my location and my situation at that. It’s very situational. My definition of community is situational,” she offers. After telling me a little bit about the communities she is involved with, which she distinguishes between family, leisure, and activist communities, positioning her disability community as an “activist community,” she describes,

Community is people to whom I can make a contribution as a member of that community, right, and people who value my contribution and who seek it out so that I can feel like a functioning, useful member of that community as opposed to, like a dependent or someone who is always taking, right? […] I do try to make a contribution and I feel that as an institutional member of some structured institutional activist communities or volunteer communities I do try to make a contribution and it’s valued but it’s valued in a different structured institutional way rather than a natural or organic way.

When I ask Geoff to tell me a little bit about the communities he is involved in at the beginning of our interview, he responds,
I guess I’ve been involved with the [AA and NA] community for... I’ve been clean for about almost 5 and a half to 6 years almost so, its been—I feel like I’ve had a lot of experience in the community. [...] I guess, like, in the community for me this is where I feel most connected just because it’s a place where, like, everyone has their own, like, common goal. Like they wanna get—they wanna stop using drugs. They wanna stop using alcohol. [...] Mainly in the community it involves, ah, like, going to meetings which I feel are at the core of creating, a, creating a collective consciousness in terms of, like identifying with each other. But also everyone kinda recognizes that they have their own individual, sort of story, ah, to bring as well....

In their responses, we seem to have two fairly distinct understandings of community and what constitutes communal participation. Both Sandra and Geoff are articulating a disability community that is an important yet distinct part of their lives, rather than a community in which they live all of the time. Sandra identifies herself as an “institutional member of some structured institutional activist communities or volunteer communities” and Geoff identifies himself as a member of the AA and NA community, the core of which is created by attending meetings, a structure in itself.

Sandra knows community through feeling connected to other people, specifically, people to whom she can make a contribution (which she later describes as “efforts towards rights-based initiatives”), and, more specifically, people who value her contribution, who “seek it [even her] out.” Contributing to community and having that contribution valued leads Sandra to “feel like a functioning, useful member of that
community as opposed to, like a dependent or someone who is always taking.” Geoff also describes how feeling a sense of belonging is generated through his connection to other members with whom he shares a common goal of staying sober. We get the sense that this common goal is both recognized and pursued within the shared experience of going to meetings, an experience that Geoff identifies as at “the core of creating a collective consciousness of community.” We also get the sense that at the same time as a common goal is recognized, it is also recognized that there are different stories, different relations to, and different distances from the common goal of staying sober. In this community, these differences seem to be recognized and welcomed rather than taken up as a cause for banishment or even erased or normalized within the collective. Geoff elaborates on his relation to this common goal, as previously quoted in this chapter (pp. 6-7), he tells me that all members of the AA and NA communities are “supposed to be working with a higher power” and for him, as it is for many, this “higher power” is the “spirit in the room or, like, the collectiveness within the rooms.” From Geoff, I get the sense that dedication to the community, and the “collective consciousness” it creates, is a key component to his feeling a sense of community.

As Sandra and Geoff describe the communities that they are a part of, they both articulate feelings of belonging in community. Between Sandra and Geoff’s stories of what community is, told to me in response to my request for them to tell me a bit about the communities they belong to, we have two fairly different iterations of how community is felt: both Sandra and Geoff identify as members of structured disability communities, one feels a sense of belonging in community when her contribution is recognized and valued by, even sought out by, the other members of the group while the
other feels belongingness through a dedication to the community, to his members, “the collectiveness within the rooms,” and to a common goal, staying sober, a goal to which different members have different relations. The rub between “contribution” and “dedication” as the bind of community offers a “compelling invitation” (Dion, 1999, p. 17) to think through the intricate ways we invest in community and connect to community members. At first pass, it seems as though investing in community through making a contribution to it and having that contribution recognized by other communal members is a straightforward exchange indicative of belonging to community for the “wrong reasons,” that is, the investment in producing oneself as “functioning” and “useful” in pursuit of “recognition” rather than making communal contributions for the “good of community” in a selfless way. Seemingly in contrast, Geoff’s articulated dedication to community, to the “spirit in the room,” may appear to be more consistent with the “right reasons” to be invested in community exemplary of a selfless giving of his whole self. Instead of positioning these stories against one another in opposition, one representing a good, selfless story of community, the other a bad, selfish story, I want to listen more deeply.

Geoff does not articulate wanting his dedication, a form of contribution, to be recognized by other communal members, in the way that Sandra does. However, in order to enact a space and the “collective consciousness” within the space wherein oneself and others can feel welcomed, supported, and even desired, requires that dedication to enacting that space is recognized by others. Indeed, though articulated quite differently, mutual recognition of a sustained commitment to enacting this space of alterity and the feeling of the space which makes it feel differently from all other spaces, making it feel
like community is necessary for the emergence of community. Perhaps feeling community through “contribution” and “dedication,” though articulated differently, are both ways of joining together with other community members through the shared investment of enacting a space of alterity. And, in both cases, the enactment of this space requires the collective recognition of a shared, sustained investment in enacting this space of alterity amidst an insecure, normative terrain in which ableist logic circulates. From listening closely to the rub between these two stories, acknowledging them as different but not completely distinct, propels me to think that collective recognition of a shared investment may be a necessary part of enacting community, no matter how it is articulated. The “compelling invitation” that was made possible by putting these stories next to each other and attending to their difference with curiosity rather than with the will to position them as opposites according to social rules dictating what is a ‘good’ and what is a ‘bad’ community practice, teaches me something about the importance of recognition within the processes of enacting community.

As these excerpts from Geoff and Sandra’s interviews demonstrates, what community ‘is’ is hard to define. Throughout all of my interviews, participants described ‘knowing’ every part of community through how it was felt. In particular, participants connect feeling and not feeling a sense of belongingness in community to whether or not they share in the communal practices, understandings, and investments in their communities. Participants even described how community feels when identifying which communities they belong to in response to my first question, which asks: Which communities do you belong to? Returning to Geoff’s stories of experiences in his AA and NA communities, I want to think about how, just as we can feel where community is not,
finding community also has a feeling. Consider this part of Geoff’s interview when he is talking about his experience at AA and NA meetings, meetings he identifies as “at the core of creating a collective consciousness,” he further describes a collective feeling engendered in community:

When you are at a meeting its so interesting how you can pick up or feel what they are feeling or understand what they are saying. And you don’t, like, no one is gonna, like, question you or be like, ah <pause> it’s just like, so you just feel a connection so much. I don’t know…

Geoff is trying to articulate something—a feeling of belongingness in community—that is quite ineffable. Geoff feels a connection with other community members in the communal space of the meetings. He feels that there is a shared understanding between him and other communal members, and this shared understanding emerges in the community practices of attending meetings together, a practice that, as he describes at another point in his interview, leads to the shared communal investment in staying sober and supporting others in his community to do the same. In the structured AA and NA communities, members, understandings, practices, and investments come together to create community. And there is also a key element—a feeling—that is necessary for community, both structured and unstructured, to be enacted. We know community through feeling it, although this way of ‘knowing’ may be difficult to put into words. It is this communal feeling that my participants attempt to articulate.

Both Sandra and Geoff describe being in communities wherein they felt that they belonged. This experience echoed my own experience of being in community that desires disability. Similar to Sandra and Geoff, Melissa and Anna describe how they felt
community at the very moment they were describing which communities they belonged
to in response to my initial question. Through their stories it seemed that in their
disability communities—Accessibility Services and Best Buddies respectfully—ableism\textsuperscript{47}
was a common understanding, a set of beliefs with which members of these communities
had to engage. When Anna and Melissa did not share in attitudes, beliefs, or practices
that were informed by ableist logic, they were made to feel excluded from the
community, made to feel as though they did not belong. Consider this part of Melissa’s
response:

I don’t feel, I feel a sense of community on the surface, I feel like that’s
what they want them, everyone to think, but I feel like there’s a lot of, um
<pause> a lot of inequity for the buddies [disabled members]. They are not

\textsuperscript{47} I want to clarify how I am using the terms ‘ableism’ and ‘disableism’ in this chapter. Fiona Kumari-
Campbell (2009, p. 44) distinguishes between the terms, suggesting that disableism is, “the set of
assumptions (conscious or unconscious) and practices that promote differential or unequal treatment of
people because of actual or presumed disabilities” whereas ableism is “a network of beliefs, processes, and
practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporal standard) that is projected as the
perfect, species-typical, and therefore essential and fully human.” Following Campbell, ‘disableism’ refers
to practices and actions whereas ‘ableism’ refers to a logic, an ideology, a belief system. Rather than
supposing a clear distinction between ableism and disableism, as Kumari-Campbell seems to do, I
understand this logic and this practice to be mutually constitutive and cyclical. Ableism is a logic out of
which disabling practices are born. Such practices also sustain and reinforce the logic of ableism. For
example, that doorways into professors’ offices are not wide enough to accommodate all mobility devises
is reflective of the logic of ableism. That no one thought to make sure that people riding mobility devises
could enter into these offices reflects a cultural assumption that no one at the university—students,
professors, administrators, visitors—will be disabled, indicative of ableist logic through which university
students, staff, professors, and visitors are imagined to be nondisabled, the disabled person in the university
is left unimagined. The practice of building doorways on office doors to not accommodate mobility
devises is born out of the logic of ableism. If a professor refuses to meet a student who cannot enter into
their office at another location, this is a further example of disableism and also, again, reflective of ableist
logic. Both of these disabling practices, which are made possible by ableism, also sustains its logic, thus
ensuring that disabling acts will continue. An example of this disableism/ableism loop, drawing on
Titchkosky’s (2009) phenomenological account of how the extraordinary exclusion of disabled people from
the university in ordinary ways, is the statement, ‘we didn’t build a ramp into the building because there are
no disabled students here.’ This statement demonstrates how disabling acts and ableist logic are mutually
constitutive and, thus, both in need of critical interrogation.
treated as equal, um, a lot of the time. I feel like—yeah, I don’t feel like there is community, in the traditional sense of the word.

In response to the same opening request to tell me a bit about the communities she was involved in, Anna replied:

I made lots of friends [at an Accessibility Services workshop for first-year students with disabilities] and met people who had disabilities and just, we talked about the problems we had and the people coordinating the workshop [peers] told us about problems we might encounter at U of T and dealing with, like, people at Test and Exam Services and Note-Taking Services [services for students registered with Accessibility Services, housed under Accessibility Services]…

Soon after, when I asked Anna how she felt disability was understood at Accessibility Services, she told me the following story of her experience with Test and Exam Services, a service “responsible for coordinating and overseeing equitable test/exam accommodations for students with disabilities” (Test and Exam Services, para 1, 2012):

For my exam last Friday, I got at—to the exam at Test and Exam Services— at, like, 2:00 and you’re usually suppose to come ten minutes early. And they only took me at 2:06 and they told me I was late! And, I was just like, ‘What’? How can I be late if I was here at 2:00 and you didn’t get me in time! You’re gonna deduct my time because I was here and you didn’t have time to talk to me right away?’ That’s totally not fair but then, like, I’m pretty sure that everyone at Accessibility Services
knows the problem students have especially at Test and Exam Services,
but nothing’s really being done about it, as far as I can tell, so… yeah.

Arriving on time to an appointment when one is not instructed to arrive early is not
grounds for punishment without some other processes at work. Even arriving late to an
appointment, though perhaps somewhat inconvenient, is likely understandable when we
think about the obstacles in a city, in a university, and with public transportation one has
to traverse in order to arrive at an appointment on time. It is not inconceivable—perhaps
it is even likely—that one’s disability and the barriers and ableism they encounter could
slow down the ‘getting there’ process. Anna and her on-time arrival, however, were
treated punitively and the consequence was that she had some of the time she had to take her exam deducted. And because Anna had come to Test and Exam Services
to write her exam precisely because she needed more time that was standardly allotted,
this consequence was consequential. Anna is a racialized disabled student and the
punitive treatment she received within Test and Exam Services is likely a result of
imbricating systems of oppression—racism, sexism, and ableism—working together to
make her legible as more than just an unwelcomed student, but a disruptive one. I think
about Anna’s story reflecting back on my argument about how geography is entangled in
the meaning-making process of a person put forth in chapter two, particularly Fabris’s
(2011) example of how his request for water was met with an aggressive response. We
cannot be sure what caused the person working at Test and Exam Services to treat Anna
as a “criminal” for a crime she did not commit, but attending to the ways that disability
becomes clarified through race, class, gender, and geography tells us that Anna’s
designation and consequent treatment as a ‘criminal student’ was not a neutral or natural meaning-making process.

Further along in the interview when Anna and I were talking about the social model of disability, I asked her if she felt like Accessibility Services viewed the problem of disability as being in her rather than being in the social. Anna replied:

Yeah, that’s exactly how I feel. That it is my problem and they’re just like, especially with Test and Exam Services, they’re just doing their job and I have a disability. That’s why I come there, it’s all me, me, me. And I don’t think that they realize disability is created through social interactions and stuff. And stigma attached to disability and, yeah, it’s definitely, yeah, they don’t think that it is social thing. They think that it’s an individual thing and your disability is in your body, it’s your problem, you know?

It’s an individual thing, so.

We have three stories from two storytellers who share common experiences of feeling estranged from the disability communities with which they supposedly belong as disabled people, disabled students in particular. As a listener to these stories, it strikes me that their feelings of estrangement are connected to the understandings of disability that circulate within these communities, specifically, an ableist understanding of disability that informs the shared understandings in these communities which does not match their own. I am compelled by the notion that ableism circulates within these communities which have the social inclusion of disabled people as their mandate. It seems to me unbelievable that ableism would be so rampant and systemic in these disability communities; both Melissa and Anna told me stories of how ableist logic informed the
very foundations of these communities, these were not just isolated instances of ‘bad
behaviour.’ And, yet, in Anna and Melissa’s stories, the pervasiveness of ableism in these
disability communities seems so… easy. I want to listen carefully to how it is that
ableism is tolerated within communities and how ableist logic informs the understanding,
practices, and investments of these structured disability communities on the U of T
campus.

Turning first to Melissa’s account, she is describing how she experiences the Best
Buddies community, an organization that connects nondisabled university students with
disabled, mostly cognitively impaired, non-university students who are referred to within
this community as “buddies.” She describes how she experiences community, and
encounters with ableism within this community, in relation to a “traditional sense” of
community. This notion of a “traditional sense” of community, too, is “known” through a
feeling. Melissa does not feel community based on her sense of what community should
feel like and, therefore, should be. Based on her description of what community should
not feel like, we gather some understanding of what she thinks community should be and
should feel like. In this excerpt, Melissa attributes her sense of not feeling community
where it is promised to be due to “a lot of inequity for the buddies”—ableism. It seems to
me to be fairly common for communities, particularly disability communities housed on
university campuses, to want and strive for all communal members to be treated
“equitably,” in other words, justly, with respect. Melissa feels that “traditional”
communities would treat all of its members equitably. Although I understand that
antagonism may be a feature of some communities, it may even be welcomed as a sign of
democratic discussion and productive conflict, I would hazard to suggest that the unjust,
or systemic “inequitable” treatment of a significant portion of one’s community would not be tolerated. As Melissa observed, such treatment would suggest the breakdown of community in most senses of the word. That the Best Buddies community treats their disabled members inequitably, treatment which Melissa describes through many stories told to me throughout her interview, tells us much about how this community understands disability and its disabled members. Given that we understand communities to be ‘traditionally’ warm spaces, spaces of safety within an insecure world, we can easily anticipate that all community members would be treated with respect and even a certain amount of friendliness (Bauman, 2001, pp. 1-3). However, in this Best Buddies community, disabled members are not treated in this way, from which we might only conclude that they are not recognized as communal members, even though this community has stated the inclusion and acceptance of disabled people as their goal (Best Buddies, 2014).

Further in the interview, Melissa described that the inequitable treatment of “buddies,” namely the ableist assumption that folks with cognitive impairments are unable to make friends and participate in social life independently forms the very foundation of the Best Buddies community. According to the Best Buddies (2014) website:

Best Buddies is a national charitable organization that helps provide meaningful friendships for people with intellectual disabilities. Through Best Buddies, students and people with intellectual disabilities are matched in one-to-one friendships and spend time enjoying the same
experiences that most people take for granted: going for coffee, watching a
movie or simply enjoying the company of a friend.

Best Buddies has identified a “problem” and through its structured, facilitated
community, they are offering a solution. Without even addressing whether or not
cognitively impaired folks (as a community? as a whole?) actually have a “problem”
negotiating social life—making friends or going for coffee, as examples—a conception
that Melissa addresses further along in her interview, which I will discuss, I want to first
think about the kind of solution Best Buddies is offering. The “problem” that Best
Buddies is identifying is the social exclusion of disabled people. We could even extend
their list of “experiences that most people take for granted” to include experience such as
finding employment of their choice and earning a living wage, having full autonomy over
their sexual and reproductive health, having their dietary decisions respected, having their
right to parent recognized and respected, and so on. Disabled people do encounter many
“problems” resulting from the ways we are not imagined or desired to be a part of
everyday public life. Following a disability studies analysis, we know that inaccessible
environments and pervasive structural and attitudinal ableism prevents cognitively
impaired folks from “enjoying these experiences,” and it is not our disability, “biology
gone wrong” that causes lack of enjoyment. Simply put, the source of the “problem” that
Best Buddies is identifying is ableism. This organization, whose “long-term goal is to
make every school and community more inclusive and accepting of people with
intellectual disabilities” (Best Buddies, 2014), could work towards any number of
solutions to these problems. As examples, they could lobby governments to make space,
including universities, colleges, and other training centres, as well as workplaces,
accessible. They could offer support to disabled people filing class action suits against institutions that contained and abused disabled people for decades. They could join disability rights efforts to defend the rights of cognitively impaired people to parent. However, the “solution” Best Buddies offers is to pair nondisabled university student volunteers with cognitively impaired people (not university students) to be “friends,” in quotation marks, for a semester or two, however long the university student chooses to be enrolled in this volunteer program. This solution—to offer a “friend” in the most artificial of fashions (Melissa told me that the university students are instructed to call their “buddies” once a week)—assumes that disabled people are incapable of finding friends in unstructured ways. It also assumes that disabled people won’t be able to identify—or be bothered by—whether or not a friendship is “real” or constructed. All of these assumptions are premised upon ableist understandings. Best Buddies, in its very definition of itself, is offering an ableist solution to a problem of ableism. This demonstrates that the “inequitable treatment of buddies” is not infrequent or circumstantial but, rather, systemic. It seems that what Melissa understands disability community to be is a place and space free of ableism, a fair assumption to have of a disability community. And so encounters with ableism, for her, mean the loss of community. As she says later on in our interview, “I think in terms of my community, it doesn’t feel like a community. I feel like disability is seen as something that <sigh> is a nuisance.” She is clearly connecting her feelings of a community lost—a community missing from a place where it should have been—to ableist understandings of disability understood here. In all of these ways, Best Buddies is more that just a “bad example” of
disability community; it tells us much about how and where our culture expects disabled to participate in “community.”

Anna describes her experience of disability community housed in the university—Accessibility Services—based on how she feels about community. Anna is articulating a community feeling and experience in a way similar to Melissa’s. Different than Melissa’s experience of feeling estranged from her community, Anna is describing how the feeling of encountering ableism where she was expecting to find community was one that she shared with other disabled students, which, in turn, generated another kind of community, “making friends.” Anna describes making friends through the communifying event of talking with other disabled students about problems they may encounter in university life, specifically at Test and Exam Services (2012), a service that, by its own definition, is responsible for overseeing equitable accommodations for students with disabilities (para 1). The problems that Anna and her community members are identifying are different than the problems identified by Best Buddies in their mission statement. While Best Buddies locates the problem of disability—namely social exclusion—in disabled people, Anna and her friends are locating this problem in university culture and structures, in Test and Exam Services specifically. Anna goes on to tell us a story about arriving at Test and Exam Services on time and being treated (punitively) as though she was late. Elsewhere in our interview, Anna tells me that she is searched before entering into an exam (even her water bottle is treated as a potential vessel for hiding forbidden material) in a way that her friends who take exams ‘with everyone else’ are not. This treatment, Anna describes, makes her, “feel like a criminal.” Through such treatment, which seems to be routinized at Test and Exam Services, Anna is rendered a problem of education.
Disability is located in biology gone wrong, it is “[her] problem.” Again, we find the inequitable treatment of disabled people – ableism—where it ought not to be, built into the very workings of disability community housed in the university, a community which by its self-definition is responsible for ensuring that disabled students are being treated in an equitable way. Startlingly similar to the Best Buddies community, Accessibility Services, is a body in the university created specifically with ensuring the equitable treatment of disabled people as their mandate. Like Best Buddies, Accessibility Services recognize that disabled people are treated inequitably in university life—in fact, this recognition formed the impetus for their very inception. And, so, it seems reasonable to assume that both of these university-housed disability communities would be dedicated to ensuring the safety and respect of all of its members, particularly disabled members. However, by Anna and Melissa’s accounts, both disabled and nondisabled community members who do not share in the communal understanding of disability informed by ableist logic are made to feel estranged from these communities, made to feel out of place where these expected to feel in place, even welcome. That disabled people are discriminated against through ableist logic is such a systemic, routinized way within both the Best Buddies and Accessibility Services, tells us much about how this university body understands disability and regards the disabled students who are (supposedly) community members gives me, the story-listener, great pause for thought. I continue listening to and thinking with these interviews, exploring how we know community by how we feel it and

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48 According to the University of Toronto Accessibility Services website, “We strive to create a safe and comfortable community for students where they can navigate their disability and related barriers, facilitate peer support and interactions, and provide various academic and social opportunities” (n.d.) Retrieved from https://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/Peer-Mentoring.htm on March 3, 2014.
how encountering ableism within disability communities can upset this feeling of belongingness.

Turning again to Melissa’s experience of the Best Buddies community, I want to continue to think about how this community poses an ableist solution to an ableist problem in its structural practice of “creating opportunities for one-to-one friendships” (Best Buddies, 2014) between nondisabled university students and disabled people who are not students. Listening to how these relationships are structured—we could even say they are manufactured—leaves me to feel as though there is a distinct difference between friendship and “buddiship.” Melissa told me that the university students are instructed by the organization to call their “buddy” once a week and there is no expectation that the “buddy” will, or will want to, call them. She told me that when the university students drop out of the volunteer program, either after a term or a few years, the “buddy” relationship is not sustained. Melissa recounts many times that she observed the “volunteers” infantilize their buddies. “Because they want to put it on their resume […] they don’t take it seriously,” was what Melissa cited as the primary reason that she thought most university students became involved in this program: a “benefit,” she told me, that was emphasized by the organization’s staff. The structure and the language in the Best Buddies community draws strict distinctions between those they are bringing together, that is, the “buddies,” intellectually disabled, people not in university and “volunteers,” nondisabled university students. I asked Melissa if there were ever any transgressions of these categories, if “buddies” were ever university students and if “volunteers” were ever disabled and she said that she, “[didn’t] think so.” In this way, Best Buddies fosters relationships between disabled and nondisabled folks that are
heavily structured. By Melissa’s description, Best Buddies does not anticipate that these relationships could occur organically out of a desire to be together, which would also include a desire to be with disability, communally. When I ask Melissa if she notices any power relations between the disabled folks labeled “buddies” and the university student volunteers, she tells me this:

The way the whole thing’s [Best Buddies] structured, it seems to me that they think that the Buddies can’t find friends for themselves when I know for a fact that my buddy has friends outside of the Best Buddies community. I know that, um, a lot of other buddies have friends outside of the community. There are a lot of Buddies that actually go to work, they have their own social circles. I know in first year, um, this girl, um, one of the buddies, she was, I don’t know why she was there. I guess her mom had put her into the program to get her friends. But, um, I know that my friend who was also in the program who was partnered with her, um, she said she had a lot of friends and she didn’t know why she was there. The buddy said, ‘I don’t know why I’m here, I have friends, I have a job, I go to school, I don’t know why I’m in this program.’ She ended up dropping out two weeks later and, I mean, I feel like Best Buddies, the organization itself, treats buddies like they can’t do any of that themselves, when really, they can. […] I guess…it…doesn’t actually reach <sigh>, the goal that it started out with wanting to get. It actually <sigh>, it harms, I think, more than it does good.
Melissa is a member of this community and has been for more than two years. We cannot be sure why Melissa joined this community to begin with or why she continues to be involved with this community (when I asked after her motivations for joining, she replied that she was “interested in it”). We can be sure that Melissa is articulating a version of community in Best Buddies from which she feels estranged, an estrangement that is achieved through the way that she is distancing herself from it. This distancing tells us much about her expectations for community. Melissa, “know[s] for a fact that [her] buddy has friends outside of the Best Buddies community.” She knows that “other buddies” (disabled members), “actually go to work [and] have their own social circles [which we could understand to be communities].” She feels like Best Buddies, “doesn’t actually reach the goal that it started out wanting to get.” All of these facts and assertions about the lives of the disabled members of this community and the way that these realities rub up against the intentions of the Best Buddies “goals,” goals that they fail to achieve, give us a sense of what Melissa understands this community’s failures to be, in part, a result of the failure to recognize the “buddies” as full and complete people, with jobs, friends, and social circles (communities?). By this articulation of how Best Buddies has failed to achieve community, their goals, we might wonder about how Melissa imagines that these goals could possibly be met. From Melissa’s words we gather that Best Buddies failed to meet its goals—of providing community for disabled people—because it failed to recognize disabled people as people with livelihoods (“go to work”) and communities (“social circles”). It seems to me that if Best Buddies were to recognize disabled people as having full lives and participating in their own communities, the foundational purpose of Best Buddies—to work toward the social inclusion of disabled
people—would be irrelevant, which gives us some sense of the shared understanding of disability that Best Buddies is invested in (which will be followed up later in my next chapter). So, then, if this is the kind of community that Melissa is distancing herself from, the kind of community that is unsuccessful in providing community for disabled people because it fails to recognize that they already have community, what, then, is the community (and the adjusted communal goals) that Melissa is moving towards, given the investments and related constraints of the Best Buddies community?

Melissa’s observations as someone situated in this community, though uncomfortably, reveal to us that Best Buddies does not imagine that disabled folks can form relationships organically and without the assistance of a charitable organization and its dutiful volunteers. Reflecting on the practices—the rules for engaging one’s “buddy,” described above—Best Buddies assumes that disabled people will not be able to detect or be bothered by the difference between a friendship enacted through a mutual desire to be together and a structured relationship born out of a desire to ‘help’ or improve one’s resume. Best Buddies is structured on the disabling idea that disabled people cannot find friends because we are flawed rather than as a result of living in an ableist culture in which disabled people are excluded by inaccessible environments and attitudinal barriers, created by conceptions of disabled people as socially undesirable perpetuated, in part, by organizations like Best Buddies. But, of course, as Melissa says, disabled people can forge friendships. And, in those times when we find ourselves without friends (when we would like them), an artificially staged “buddiship” muddied with ableist expectations, rules, and resumes, likely won’t come as a welcomed placeholder until we do find a meaningful friendship. More than this, in between the words of “one-to-one” friendships
lies the assumed impossibility that relationships of and with disabled people could never transgress a linear, and, in this case, manufactured, configuration. The possibility that relationships could grow, could diversify, could get messy, could fall apart and, then, grow again, could turn into love, could turn into partnership, parent-ship, multiple partnership, could create family, jealously, activism, art, scholarship, and more, is left unimaginable. Community is unimaginable.

Both the Best Buddies and Accessibility Services communities have the social inclusion of disabled people as their mandate. We also know that ableist logic forms the foundational workings of both of these communities; a quick orientation around each of these communities’ websites tells us that they make no effort to veil the ableism around which they organize, even as they describe their plans to include disabled people. And so it follows that in order to join either community—even to understand what they are up to—requires one to at least acknowledge, if not altogether buy into, the shared understanding of disability as socially undesirable… or, perhaps, the understanding of disability as socially desirable in a way that supports a version of disability that appears through ableist logic. This sensibility of disability is the only way through which to makes sense of this community—its practices and its investments. Indeed, Best Buddies and Accessibility Services are both invested in actualizing this understanding of disability as socially excludable and undesirable in order to maintain themselves as organizations. Melissa and Anna are members of these communities (regardless of their motivations for joining, however, it does seem clear why a disabled student in need of accommodation

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49 As stated on the About us page of the Best Buddies website, “Our long-term goal is to make every school and community across Canada more inclusive and accepting of people with intellectual disabilities” (para 1 (n.d.) Retrieved from http://bestbuddies.ca/about-us/ on February 27, 2014).

50 See descriptions on page 22, page 25, footnote 6 on page 30, and in the next chapter in footnote 7 on page 66.
might join Accessibility Services), and, yet, they both feel estranged from these communities. They both articulate this estrangement as being provoked by a communal shared understanding of disability created through ableist logic (disability as problem for social inclusion; disability as always and only socially undesirable; disability as problem of education; disability as criminal) with which they did not identify. Such “disidentification” (Munoz, 1999; Ferguson, 2004) with these shared understandings led them to feel as though they did not belong.

To disidentify is to take up with revisions, to determine “the silences and the ideologies that reside within critical terrain,” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 5) and to (re)use theories in ways that were not originally intended. Both Best Buddies and Accessibility Services are (advertised as) places for disabled people. These are the communities we may find when we are looking to experience disability communally. And in them, we are sure to find other disabled people with whom we can create friendships—create community—as both Anna and Melissa describe. We may also feel estranged from these places and in them is where we may also find community, as is evident in these stories. I think that disidentification, as Rodrick Ferguson (2004, p. 5) articulates it, may be useful for describing the uncanny experience of being both compelled and repelled by these uncomfortable community spaces at the same time. I want to briefly think about how we might occupy these spaces differently (a discussion which will be further elaborated in my concluding chapter). Bauman (2002, p. 2) writes that we typically expect (but do not experience) communities to be comfortable spaces, full of consensus and free of antagonism. In this way, “‘community’ stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us” (Bauman, 2002, p. 3). Bauman (2002, pp. 2-4) proposes that
encounters with antagonism may not necessarily be indicative of the breakdown of community; it might, indeed, be characteristic of community. I am not suggesting that either Best Buddies or Accessibility Services are modeling any sort of crip community that I am searching out, but I wonder how we might live differently in these spaces wherein we so often find ourselves and other disabled people. As Melissa and Anna’s stories demonstrate, we may be able to forge friendships and, through them, occupy these hostile spaces in ways other than how they were intended. And, in this way and orienting to community as Bauman would have us do, engage antagonism as we rework these spaces.

I am listening to the stories told to me in interviews with a curiosity for how community becomes enacted. This curiosity emerged from my own experiences of disability community wherein I, too, experience community through feeling it. Listening to how feelings can point us towards community, as all of these stories describe, also suggests that we might also be able to feel where community is not enacted, even in places where it is meant to be. Reflecting on the story I opened this dissertation story of meeting a man on the sidewalk, a togetherness provoked by his noticing of my different walk accentuated by my high-heeled boots, I described feeling community, I felt as though disability—my disability—was desired in this moment. And this felt differently than, say, being a disabled member of the Best Buddies community, a structured place flooded with ableist logic, might feel. Listening to Melissa’s story, I can imagine that the togetherness structured here might cause me to feel unwelcomed and undesired, and this feeling, likely, would cause me to feel a sense of estrangement, similar to the sense Melissa described. This knowing through feeling, tells us something about how
community is enacted. It tells us that, for community to be so, something needs to be generated, a feeling of belongingness needs to be produced. From listening to the rub between Geoff and Sandra’s stories and, then, the rub between Melissa and Anna’s stories, we know that “shared understandings” (Bauman, 2001, p. 14) of disability may provide the bind of community. I carry on listening to these stories, ever-curious about how this feeling is produced and, at the same time, knowing that we may never know.

Communal Dynamics

Positing, as I do, that crip communities cannot simply be structured, but, rather, need to be enacted through some sort of shared understanding of disability, which, in turn, produces a feeling of belongingness, suggests that crip communities could be enacted at anytime between anyone. Thinking about shared understandings rather than by shared identities or embodiments (in this case, disability) gives us a different, more complicated and perhaps more creative, sense of how community is produced. Early on in the interviews, I asked participants to talk about who their communal members were and how one’s disability affected their membership for example, whether one’s non-disability status required them to be an ‘ally,’ drawing on contemporary political identity-based community nomenclature, and, if so, how did this ally-position affect how they could participate in community. I asked this question with the understanding that the unpredictable, ever-shifting character of disability—which can be written on the body in a noticeable way, or not, can come to us and, just as quickly leave us and, thus, requires us to consider identity as also unstable (Hall, 1996, p. 1).
When I ask Anna who can belong to her community, she discussed the Friday Drop-In hours, a space for students registered with Accessibility Services:

I think anyone can be involved in the community, but you have to be, you can’t be closed-minded, you can’t be, like, ‘No, disability isn’t you, blah, blah, blah and be, like, arrogant or whatever. So, I think anyone can belong in the community, but for me that community is people who understand what I’ve gone through. But, I really think that if you can try to sympathize and understand that you are part of it because you are trying to look at [disability] in a different way and see our perspectives rather than, just, you know, the regular perspective.

Anna tells us very specifically, “anyone can belong” in the community created in Friday Drop-In Hours but for her, community is held together by an understanding of “what [she] has gone through.” Reflecting on this passage and what we know about how Anna has experienced university life, and negotiating Test and Exam Services specifically, as described throughout this chapter, tells us that she understands herself as a student who is represented within the university as a problem of education. She described being treated punitively when she arrives to Test and Exam Services on time and was treated as though she was late; she describes feeling like a criminal when she has her water bottle searched before entering her exam; in fact, she describes the Friday Drop-In Hours as, “a safe space to accept others’ disability and it’s, like, just a place where we can, like, rant about things that, like, made us angry or upset that we’ve been treated in this way.” All of these examples demonstrate that the university’s understanding of disability is informed by ableist logic; the problem is clearly located in Anna (and likely other disabled students).
rather than in the disabling structures and systems of the university that were designed through an ableist logic for the corporeal standard that this logic desires. Feeling as though she does not belong in university culture, which is an ableist culture, is likely part of what Anna “goes through.” In order for one to understand this as a relentless experience (“going through” implies that something has been endured; we typically do not use this phrase to describe an experience that was pleasant or easy), they must identify that the logic of ableism that was at play, informing practices, such as the practices Anna describes enduring at Test and Exam Services, which lead to the disablement of disabled students; they must understand disability different from “the regular way,” a problem located in an individual understood as deficient. Anna also tells us that in order for a member to belong, they must “understand that [they] are a part of it [community].” In this way, belonging to community requires that one acknowledge the space as a disability community, one separate from the community structured within Accessibility Services wherein normative understandings of disability and ableist logic circulate. More than this, one must also understand oneself as belonging to this community. Anna is putting forth a detailed set of conditions in order for one to belong to her disability community. These are based upon a shared understanding, both an acknowledgement of ableism and its disabling workings within the university as well as a different understanding of disability. Anna is not suggesting that one must embody disability to be a member. For her, community is bound together by shared understandings rather than shared embodiments or identities.
Sandra’s story describes the value of nondisabled community members can have in disability community building, referring to one of the U of T disability student groups that she belongs to:

One of the board members was a woman who identified as, um, I think she identified as bisexual. And she was very active, very smart, and very thoughtful. And through her own work on her own identity and her own studies, she had become interested in disability. And she had run for the board as an ally. […] And she was one of our best board members. She was one of the smartest and most resourceful and actually kind of wise, one of the most emotionally-wise members of the board, right? We had board members who were formally disabled who were actually terrible about respecting the needs of people with disabilities. She didn’t have a disability and she was actually a better ally than—ah, better colleague, or, ah, comrade, <laughs>, in any struggles that we had than some of the other people who were formally, or officially disabled! […] And I think this is something we have to learn as a disability community […] just because a person has a disability doesn’t mean they are going to think the same way we do or they share all of our views, right?

Sandra is also articulating a difference between disabled and nondisabled members within her community although, like Anna, we get the sense that various people are welcome, regardless of how or if they (currently) embody disability. In the excerpt above, Sandra is speaking specifically about one of her community members who does not identify as disabled but as an ally. This nondisabled woman is welcomed into this
disability community as a member. In fact, Sandra describes her as, “one of [their] best board members.” For this woman to not only be welcomed within this community, but recognized by Sandra as “one of the best,” she must be connected to this community somehow, if not through disability embodied than by a shared understanding of disability and a connection through her own queer identity. Although Sandra does not describe how this woman understands disability, from this excerpt we can glean that, for Sandra, an essential community practice is “respecting the needs of people with disabilities,” something that other “formally” disabled members were terrible at. This practice reveals something to us about what Sandra understands as the shared, communal understanding of disability, namely, an experience that comes with a particular set of needs. Sandra expects these needs to be respected within disability community, suggesting that these needs are not necessarily respected within the normative practice of respecting people’s needs. Herein lies a conception that the needs of people with disabilities are distinguishable… unique. And what makes a disability community distinguishable from the normative terrain in Sandra’s articulation is that, in this space, the needs of disabled people are respected. We can gather, then, that one of the shared understandings that bind this community is that disabled people have needs that may not be respected within normative terrain in the way that they should be. The shared understanding that Sandra is describing is quite different than the shared understanding that Anna identifies as binding her community, that is, understanding disability in a way different than “the regular way.” For Sandra, a shared understanding in her community is that disabled people have needs, needs that are not usually respected, but should be. Again, it seems as though this shared understanding is more significant to belonging to this disability community than
one’s embodiment or their identity. Indeed, for Sandra, understanding that disabled people’s needs should be respected makes this nondisabled woman “one of the best” community members, better than those who are “formally” disabled. Sandra ends with a clear description of what disability community is when she describes what she thinks we need to learn. She is asking us, as a community, to be open to the possibility that there may not necessarily be a direct correlation between whether or not someone is disabled (“formally” disabled) and how they understand disability, specifically understand it in a way that is consistent with “our views,” disrupting how we understand community through contemporary identity politics nomenclature. Sandra’s description of her relationship with this nondisabled woman tells us a few things: First, that one’s embodiment, one’s identity, and one’s understanding of disability do not necessarily correlate is something that Sandra feels our community has to “learn” tells us that in Sandra’s experience of disability community, it may have seemed to her that one’s disability status was privileged as a marker of belongingness over and above how people understood disability. And we know, from her words above, that she has met disabled people who do not necessarily share in the understanding of disability and the practices which correspond to such an understanding—recognizing disabled people as having unique needs which should be, but are not always, respected. Her description tells us that Sandra understands a shared view as a necessary part of community and, more than this, what it means to share a view or perspective. We can also gather that Sandra has some sense of what a shared, communal understanding, “our views,” may be. The understanding that disabled people have a set of needs that should be respected (and other ways of understanding that Sandra articulated throughout our conversation) is not just her
view but, a shared view, a communal view, a view that is not necessarily understood by every disabled person. Sandra is not necessarily suggesting that nondisabled people who share in an understanding of disability that is common to the community should be privileged as members over disabled people who do not share in this understanding. She is suggesting that, to enact community, we need to learn that one’s embodiment does not necessarily bring them into a politic of disability on which community is founded.

Reading Anna and Sandra’s stories together, we are left with the sense that in these particular disability communities or, rather, Anna and Sandra’s experience of them, that both disabled and nondisabled people participate in these communities and are recognized as members. However, within this permission, there does seem to be a divide expressed in the discussions of who is disabled and who is not. Moreover, such a divide in disability status does not seem to affect how one can participate in community, nor does this divide form expectation for how disabled and nondisabled participants should participate. At the same time, it is clear that, although distinguishable, both nondisabled and disabled members are welcomed and desired as community members if and when they share in the communal understanding of disability.

Later in our interview, Sandra spoke further about the requirement that allies in the disability community respect the needs of disabled people in response to my asking her if she thought that nondisabled participants should necessarily take a ‘back seat’ when participating in disability community:

No, I don’t think so. I mean, I think, I think it’s important because of historically people with—disabled people not being allowed to speak for themselves. There is a certain dynamic, power dynamic there. […] There
is a way in which people with disabilities are habitually overlooked as having the capacity to speak for themselves and represent themselves. I think a good, genuine, respectful ally will allow the disabled person—not even ‘allow’, but not get in the way of the disabled person speaking for themselves. But, I’m sure that, I’m not sure that they always have to take a back seat.

Sandra is describing an understanding of disability informed by an ableist logic which floods (and is the) normative terrain, namely, the understanding that disabled people are non-agentive and without capacity resulting in both our inability to speak for and representing ourselves as well as the need for others to speak for us. We know that this ableist understanding of disability, and the disabling practices it informs, is also present within disability communities by how both Anna and Melissa storied their experiences of community. This history, and it is a history, is one that disabled people live with; we regularly encounter these benevolent orientations to disability and the interactions they inform. And, so, we are cautious, particularly because disability communities are not necessarily spaces free from ableist understandings and disabling practices.

Thinking about some of my own experiences of such interactions, it seems to me that such understandings of disability, particularly when encountered within a disability community, are reflective of one’s investment in the community. Recalling the argument presented in chapter 2 about how we are culturally invested in ‘knowing’ what abnormalcy is in order to ‘know’ what normalcy is, as well as some of the communal practices described by Anna and Melissa, provides insight into one of the reasons why nondisabled folks might be invested in being a part of disability community and in the
production of disability as something which needs to be spoken for rather than listened to. Reflecting on the excerpt above where Sandra is describing her ally’s position within her community (page 132), she tells us that this ally is connected to the disability community student group through “her own identity and her own studies.” Being connected to the disability community through one’s own identity seems to be different than being drawn into community through a benevolent desire to help, a desire that Sandra points to when she talks about how, “people with disabilities are habitually overlooked as having the capacity to speak for themselves and represent themselves.”

Different than a desire to ‘help’ disabled people through the understanding that we cannot speak for ourselves, the nondisabled woman that Sandra is describing is connected to the disability community through her own queer identity. Although Sandra does not elaborate on how this woman’s identity brings her into this community, the way that Sandra goes on to describe her suggests that she may be recognizing disability rights as somehow connected up with her own. A desire to ‘know’ abnormalcy through encounters with disabled people is distinctly different than the desire for disability and this difference, as described by Sandra, is felt. A shared understanding of disability rather than a shared embodiment or identity, provokes feelings of being in community. In this way, this communal encounter is demonstrative of how enactments of community can ‘crip,’ or, in other words, productively disrupts the ways that we traditionally orient to community, specifically, through the grammar of identity politics which holds that shared identities necessarily create a shared politics. This criping of community, which I explore further in the next chapter, is provoked by, and gestures towards, new possibilities of being together.
To think further about communal dynamics, I turn to another of Sandra’s stories read alongside how Geoff describes interacting with folks he considers to be allies in his community. When I asked Sandra if she had anything to add at the end of the interview, she expounded upon the role allies have helping her navigate university life:

The only other thing I would say about community is allies, you know, people who have helped me to achieve things that I needed to achieve in a university context are, you know, people who have helped me write papers, people who have provided me with support letters, people who have helped me lobby the administration to get the accommodations I needed, right, like these people are allies that I can turn to and say, ‘Look, I am not getting what I need in this institutional structure. Where you have, you know, tenure and influence. And you are going out of your way to help me break down these barriers.’ I am happy to have them stand in front of me and have them do the yelling and screaming! I don’t need to speak in that context; that would be a context where the ally should be able to speak.

When I asked him to tell me about his experiences with allies, Geoff talked about different interactions he has had in unstructured disability studies communities on campus. Through this disability studies community Geoff has come to understand himself as disabled. In this part of our conversation, he was speaking about non-addict members of the disability community as his allies. He told me that he “feels like a lot of people are open […], like they’re good listeners, like they wanna engage” in contrast to the experience of going to the bar with his partner and her friends where, as he describes, “I
feel isolated, I feel alone, I feel invisible, I feel like I can’t engage, participate.” Further juxtaposing his different experience of being in a bar, a place that could potentially feel very inhospitable to him, Geoff tells me:

I was, like, feeling totally cool with it [being at a bar after a disability studies event] because I was, like, there was something more that just people going to a bar and drinking. Like everyone went to the event prior, people were just going to hang out and talk. And, like, ah, like everyone had like, ah—like it had a different—like, it wasn’t as focused on drinking. It was more hanging out because other people had other things to talk about that I actually connected with. Like when I, like, I don’t know, go out with my partner, I feel its, like—she’s with her friends who she’s known since she was, like, 12 or 13 and, like, I’m this new person. And they don’t really know me, I don’t really know them and, like, we never hang out any other time, so, yeah…

Both Sandra and Geoff are discussing the role of a community ally in the context of negotiating a potentially hostile space: for Sandra, negotiating university as a disabled student and for Geoff, negotiating a bar as a recovering addict. For both Sandra and Geoff, the togetherness with an ally can make a difference to how this space feels.

When Sandra articulates the important role the ally can play in helping her negotiate university life through activities such as helping her write essays, to helping her lobby for accommodation, we get the sense that negotiating this space and the disabling structures that are bound to be encountered within it is more easily done with the help of others, through a togetherness. Given that the university is an inhospitable space, one that
celebrates the “corporal standard” (Kumari-Campbell, 2009) and rarely expects, accommodates, or welcomes disabled students, we—the disabled community—often help each other navigate systems, fight for accommodations that are our rights, as well as making each other feel welcome. And we need togetherness with allies, too. In Sandra’s description, allies are not necessarily nondisabled others; indeed, rather than having a nondisabled person as an ally, it may be that a person in a position of power and security within the university—a tenured professor in Sandra’s description, disabled or not—can provide the alliance and solidarity needed to “break down barriers.”

While Sandra is describing the role of the ally as being someone who can help her negotiate disabling systems within the university and advocate on her behalf, Geoff responds to the question of allyship by describing more of a feeling that changes his experience of a space that is enacted between him and his allies. For Geoff, being in bars has the potential to be an isolating experience. When connections are not made with the people he is with, and he is not participating in the main activity of the group—drinking—he is left feeling “alone” and “isolated.” In contrast, when he is able to make connections with others at the bar, a feeling of belongingness is enacted. When he went out to a bar with others who had just experienced the same disability event as he had, a connection was made. Without drinking, Geoff could participate; there was another shared activity through which to connect. Sandra describes how allies can make her feel as though she belongs in a space that was not meant for her—the university—by helping her navigate disabling systems by helping her through university activities, such as writing papers, activities created through the expectation that university studies will always embody a corporeal standard. Geoff, however, articulates the role of his allies
differently. Rather than helping him do “normal” (disabling) activities differently, Geoff’s allies help him rework space altogether. This is also achieved through a feeling.

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Listening to these stories through the orientation of hermeneutic phenomenology, as I do in this chapter, animates the experience of community afresh, shaking community as it is ‘traditionally’ understood. The storytellers and I, the story-listener, met in the act of meaning-making, a togetherness through which new meanings of community emerged. The stories generated in the interviews I conducted bring collective sense to a collective experience—being in community. Responding to the “compelling invitation” (Dion, 1999, p. 17) that these communal stories offer provoked by the question, “What does community feel like to you?” and generated within the discussion that ensued, brings us to a, “different sense of place” (Brand, 1999). These stories of community teach us that in the very moment we attempt to articulate what community is, and our relationship to it, we must try to make sense of what ‘it’ is; community is not a self-evident phenomenon. As these stories demonstrate, there are multiple, perhaps endless, ways of orienting to community. Some participants described wanting to feel useful in their community, like their communal contribution was recognized, while others described feeling dedicated to community through sharing a common goal with other community members. All participants described knowing where community was and where it was not by the feelings that were generated. The feelings generated within communities were not always pleasurable or satisfying; indeed, many participants describe the feelings of being in
community as feelings of loss, feelings of “missed pleasures,” (Bauman, 2001) feelings of disidentification (Ferguson, 2004 Munoz, 1999).

Disidentifying with a community’s shared understandings of disability often leads to feelings of communal estrangement. Disability communities can provide ableist solutions for problems, or consequences of living as disabled within an ableist culture, consequences such as being barred from normative culture (e.g., the workforce, etc.). Sharing in the communal understanding of disability may contribute more to feelings of belongingness than does sharing in a similar embodiment or identity politic. The meanings of community that emerge from these stories tells us that although disability communities may be structured, or occur within structures such as the university, the feeling of community is not determined by external structures, although feeling of belongingness may be generated both within and outside of structured disability communal spaces. My next chapter keeps following the different ways that feelings of belongingness are generated by and through desiring disability by continuing to engage these stories of community told to me in interviews. This chapter explores how disability communities can ‘crip’ traditional ways of knowing community.
Chapter Four: Desiring Disability

Queerness should and could be about another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough.

-- Jose Esteban Munoz, 2009, p. 96

Chapter three explored how my research participants, Anna, Melissa, Geoff, and Sandra described their experience of disability communities as places in which they felt as though they both belonged and did not belong (Walcott, 2002) and, more than this, as uncanny experiences. Structured disability communities—Accessibility Services, Best Buddies, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), as well as a student disability rights group—were all places in Toronto and the University of Toronto specifically where my participants were drawn to out of a desire to be in disability communities. This chapter does not offer a critique of how these communities are structured per se, but, rather, I take up these sites as cultural locations wherein feelings of belonging within community are and are not generated. I dwell in these cultural locations as a way to explore the meaning of community as it emerges. In these structured spaces, as my participants described in their interviews, they found other disabled people, made friendships, and found support. They also describe encounters with disabling systems and practices and outright discrimination that were not just isolated instances but reflective of the way that these communities practices and principles were created and carried out.

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51 I received approval to conduct these interviews from the Ethics Review Board at U of T and I followed proper research protocol when recruiting participants, interviewing, and storing the interview material (see appendices D-F). All four research participants gave informed consent (appendix B) and they have been made anonymous within this work. All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.
through an ableist logic, pointing to the robust ableist culture sustained within these disability communities. Within this contradictory experience of “belonging and not belonging” (Walcott, 2002), they all described ‘knowing’ community through a feeling, a feeling of belongingness largely achieved through the sense that disability was understood differently within their communities than the way it was understood in ableist culture. As was also discussed, when they felt that disability was understood as a flaw or a failure, a sense of belongingness was not achieved. All of this points to how community is never fixed—cannot be structured, planned for, or, perhaps, even anticipated. But the potential for community is always ‘there,’ or maybe ‘just ahead.’

**Desiring Disability, Narrating Community**

In this chapter, I continue to think with my participants’ stories of community, following what, for me, is a “compelling invitation” to think deeply about how feelings of belongingness are achieved and how community is enacted… how it comes to us in a moment and can just as quickly leave us. As I will explicate throughout chapter five, this chapter also thinks through the ways in which we produce narratives and what such narratives produce. As I think about how we know community by the feelings generated in experiences of togetherness, we also must attend to how the way we choose to story an interaction is reflective of our desire for crip community. We give shape to community through stories. Community may be enacted through feelings and it is sustained through the communal stories we tell. As I suggested in my discussion of the story which opened this dissertation, of me and my high-heeled boots meeting a man on the sidewalk, there
were a number of interpretive possibilities out of this interaction and a number of narrative possibilities too. I could have interpreted the man’s question, ‘why are you wearing high-heeled boots’ as an act of ableist aggression. I could have storied this interaction as an experience of being ambushed by ableism. But I did not. I experienced this interaction as an enactment of community and my storying the interaction in this way is not reflective of its ‘truth,’ rather it is reflective of my narrative and political commitment. As this dissertation is demonstrative of, I am committed to thinking through, being within, and enacting crip community. And this is reflected in my narrative decisions. As I go on with this chapter attending to how community is produced through feelings, I also attend to the narrative commitments of the storyteller and think through where and how community is also produced, as is estrangement, through community.

Reflecting on the communal stories told in chapter three, we know, as much as we can know, that structures and identities, which are traditionally acknowledged as the ties that bind community, particularly through the popularized identity politic discourse, cannot be counted on to create community. Attending to the stories of community told to me in my interviews as well as reflecting on my own experiences of community, it seems to me that community is generated through narrating a feeling of belongingness. This chapter chases this thought and engages it with the idea that feelings of belongingness, which generate and sustain what I am now calling crip community, are produced out of a particular kind of desire for disability. Following Munoz’s (2009) assertion that a desire to resist the way things are could produce another way of being in the world, I think with my participants’ stories to explore the ways that we put energy into community with the hope that this energy would produce something…a feeling of belongingness. Animated
through my desire for community, which includes a desire to pay attention to how others might desire disability community, this chapter thinks through how and what desiring disability, and desiring to be in community wherein disability is desired, produces. My desire to think through how crip community is enacted is reflective of, and produced out of, my desire for community. This dissertation is produced out of this desire. This chapter also challenges my own previously unexamined notion that desiring disability is unquestionably good as I think about the ways that structured disability communities, Accessibility Services and Best Buddies in particular, desire disability and the meaning of disability that this desire produces.

Towards the end of our interviews, I asked participants to tell me about the investments they had in their community. To offer clarification to this somewhat technically worded question, a question that I would now, reflectively, rephrase to ask, “What do you hope the energy you put into your community produces?,” I offered an example from how I experience crip community. I explained that I am drawn into crip communities because in these spaces, it feels differently to be disabled than it usually does within ableist culture. In ableist culture, I elaborated, I felt that my disabled body was desired as a symbol of abnormalcy for the way that it helped to secure cultural understandings of what the normal body is and can do. In spaces of crip community, I felt that my disabled body was desired for difference in itself and this way of being desired felt differently than feelings generated in ableist culture. I ‘feel good’ being with people and in spaces that are bound together through the desire for disability, a desire that feels differently to me than the feeling of being in the midst of the ableist desire to eliminate
disability. And so, I am dedicated to producing space and encounters through the desire for disability.

When I asked Melissa to describe the investments she has in the Best Buddies community, she wanted me to clarify whether I wanted her to speak about her investments or the organization’s investments, suggesting that there was a distance between them. I told her that I was interested in her communal investments but that she should feel very free to discuss the investments of the organization or other communal members as she perceived them as well. Her response to my question was animated by the tension between her investments and the investments of other people in the Best Buddies community:

Well, my investment is my buddy. She’s my friend and I’m going to—I’m hoping to be her friend as long as I can be! <laughs> Yeah, my investment is not with the community, it’s not with Best Buddies, it’s with my friend. And, I mean, a lot of people, their investment is, ‘Oh, let’s put this on my resume… let’s…,’ you know? They do it because they are in it for something when, really, I’m just in it for a friendship. And, I mean, a lot of people are in it for other types of things, selfish reasons, really and, um <pause>. Yeah, I think people are invested in the wrong things in terms of this chapter. […] I realize that they [the “buddies”] are being treated a lot differently and a lot of people in the chapter are not invested in the way they should be invested in it, they’re not invested in the overall goal of the, the organization and <pause> maybe only one person in the head office environment actually has their own buddy, nobody else does… […] From
their point of view it’s just, like, a business. That’s their [folks in the head office] job, that’s their career, that’s all they do. And, yeah, they don’t foster friendships at all. […] They don’t have friendships.

Holding onto Melissa’s words, I want to put her into conversation with Sandra. Asking Sandra to tell me about her investments in community led to a brief discussion in which, together, we clarified what I meant by “investments” in the context of her telling me about her communal practices. I explained that I was using the word “investment” to refer to, “what I work towards, what I put my energy into and what I hope is produced from that energy.” To this, Sandra said, “Oh, like beliefs” and went on to describe how she decides which community groups she is going to put her energy into. She described the shared understandings and practices that she sought out in a community and the importance of having a safe enough space in which community members could engage in meaningful dialogue. She then shared:

I am not interested in participating in a community that is exclusively about complaint, right? I am interested in a community that is very pragmatic, that is very goal-oriented, very talk-oriented, and is actually prepared to do the work, right? Because it is a lot easier to sit around and whine and complain about things than it is to kind of read the policy documents, read the legal documents, write the letters, go to the meetings, organize the petitions, organize the meetings, discuss the issues with people who don’t agree, find out who they are, find out what their values are, figure out if there is a way to find common ground with them on these
values. This is all time-consuming, labourious work and most people don’t want to do it.

Reading these two stories of how Melissa and Sandra invest in, or put energy into, community, we encounter many different possibilities for how people may be invested in, or committed to, disability communities: Melissa, the other Best Buddies volunteers, the staff at Best Buddies, Sandra, and people who participate in the disability communities that Sandra is not interested in, all have different ways that they put energy into these communities and, correspondingly, they all generate different results (feelings, experiences, achievements, etc.) in return. Melissa tells me that her investment is with her “buddy” and, distinguishing her investment from the overall investments of the Best Buddies community, she refers to her buddies as her “friend.” I am “in it for the friendship,” Melissa tells me. Friendship is something into which we put energy in the hopes that this energy will produce something, enact a feeling of togetherness, and, perhaps, provide comfort, support, tenderness, and love, among other things. We hope, like Melissa, that friendships will last for as long as they can. But friendship, like community, is not something that will naturally, unquestionably, indefinitely sustain itself. For all of the energy we put into friendship, we are not, absolutely, guaranteed that it will last. Although friendship may be the sort of engagement that escapes definition for its multiplicity and for how the terms of these engagements are worked out in the intimate in-between of friends, I hazard to say, provoked by Melissa’s articulation of the different kinds of relationships that emerge in the Best Buddies community, that we can only ‘know’ friendship by what is not: it is not a relationship in which the terms, conditions, contracts, and, indeed, investments, are veiled, where one’s intentions are
connected not to their friend but to other goals, such as adding a credential to one’s resume. In short, a friendship, distinctly, is not a buddiship. Melissa tells us that “people are invested in the wrong things in terms of this chapter.” I agree with Melissa and I am compelled to think further about how people—other volunteers—are invested in what the energy they put into this community produces, how they desire disability, and what version of disability is produced out of their desire for it, a version of disability that they—the individuals and the Best Buddies community—is likely very invested in.

Even if, by Melissa’s articulation, the volunteers and the “people at the head office” at Best Buddies “are not invested in the way they should be invested in [the community],” they are still invested. They are contributing to this community in particular ways, investing time and energy, with the expectation that they will gain something in return. The communal investments of the volunteers and the staff are tied to a desire to build their careers as the staff of Best Buddies or by adding a ‘volunteer experience’ to their resumes, suggesting that their motivation comes from a desire to record this experience rather than through a desire for the experience itself. At first pass, it may seem as though these volunteers and staff are neglecting “the community” for the sake of their own individual advancement, but we may need to listen to this story more carefully. It may be that the Best Buddies’ staff and the other volunteers are investing in community, a community that meets neither Melissa’s nor my expectations for what a disability community should be and what members of disability communities should be invested in. It is not as though they are not invested in the “buddies;” I think that they are. Listening to Melissa describe the “wrong reasons” that Best Buddies’ staff and the other volunteers were invested in this community, I was struck by how these communal
members desired disability. I have always articulated my participation in crip communities to be motivated by a desire for disability, a desire that contests normative culture’s desire to be rid of disability. I hope that my desire produces a community, a crip community, wherein disability and the ways that disability disrupts are desired. However, and disruptive to the neoliberal language of ‘investment’ and ‘return,’ when I put energy into community—desiring disability in the ways that I do—I do so with the acknowledgment that the crip community I produce is fleeting. I know that this community will not—cannot—grow as I leave it unattended, I know that it will not be there when and if I go back to it, more robust than it was when I left it. For all of the ways I seek to cultivate community, I know that it can only ever be enacted. I address the rub between community investments and community enactments further along in this chapter.

Melissa is describing a desire for disability in the Best Buddies community. Indeed, disabled people—in particular, cognitively impaired people who are not enrolled in university (Melissa told me that none of the university student volunteers identify as disabled)—are desired within this community. A particular imagination of disability is desired, specifically the understanding that disabled people are excluded from everyday life as if their disability is an inherent character flaw, generated from the notion that disability is not socially desirable in and of itself and, therefore, no one would want to befriend a disabled person unless they received something besides friendship (“volunteer experience”) in return. Interestingly enough, an understanding that the ‘problem’ of the social exclusion of disabled people, a problem made possible through the logic of ableism which inform disabling practices, can be addressed by a disabling solution, rendered
through and therefore reflective of ableist logic. Given that desire is productive (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), we can understand that this particular desire for disabled people produces a particular meaning of disability—disability as pitiable, “naturally” excludable, and “naturally” deficient—a meaning of disability that the Best Buddies community is invested in. They are invested in this understanding of disability in order to keep this community moving as it does—“business” as usual.

For these staff members and volunteers, this disability community and the relationships that develop here are “just a business.” Melissa tells me that “[the staff] don’t have friendships.” The rub between “just a business” and not having friendships is very curious. If we suppose, for the briefest of moments, that “friendship” can refer to the structured relationships created within the Best Buddies organization, how is it that the staff who are invested in the “business” of Best Buddies are not also interested in the product that this “business” manufactures: friendship. I think that this tells us even more about how the communal members desire disability and how this desire is connected to how they are invested in the community. The staff—those employed by Best Buddies—is invested in producing a particular dynamic between the “buddies” and the “volunteers.”

Among many other artificialities, Best Buddies is invested in “manufacturing” buddiships that do not require a longitudinal investment; the university students are assured that these relationships are fleeting (fleeting investments rather than fleeting enactments), in contrast to Melissa’s hope that she and her friend can be friends for, “as long as [they] can be.” As Melissa describes, the volunteers can drop out of the program at anytime and she tells me that she does not think that any of the volunteers stay in touch with their “buddy” after they graduate.
Attending to these investments in community gives us a couple of hints as to why the Best Buddies’ staff do not have buddies. Firstly, based on the cultural understanding that disabled people are undesirable and, therefore, befriending them, even artificially for a few months, makes volunteers appear benevolent and selfless, which is considered to be advantageous when looking for a job. The staff at Best Buddies are already employed and so having “buddies” themselves may suggest that a buddiship requires more than just desiring disability as something through which one invests in their career. Secondly, and connectedly, if the Best Buddies staff had “buddies” themselves, this would disrupt the temporality of this (fleeting) relationship in which this community is so invested. It may be, in fact, that the ‘fact’ that Best Buddies staff do not have “buddies” is an indication that they are invested in the product they manufacture: artificial, fleeting relationships that are useful insofar as participating in them makes the volunteer appear employable, or so says the organization (Melissa’s interview).

Similar to Melissa, and provoked by my question about communal investments, Sandra described communal investments as an exchange of putting energy into community in the hopes of gaining something in return. Throughout her description of how she participates in community, we begin to get a sense of how Sandra is investing in her community, what she is putting into her community. Like Melissa, Sandra is describing how she invests in community in relation to the “wrong reasons” in which one might be invested in disability community: a space to communify with others in the act of “whining and complaining.” Sandra is invested in “doing the work” with others who are also “prepared to do the work: […] to read the policy documents, […] to go to the meetings, to organize the petitions” and engage antagonism in a way that is productive
for enacting social change. By this description of “pragmatic, goal-oriented” work, we also get a sense of the kind of work Sandra believes that disability communities should be doing—securing the rights of disabled people, determining what these rights might be, and how we should be working toward these rights. This kind of work, as Sandra describes it, is productive in a way that whining and complaining is not. Sandra’s description of work also tells us about what she imagines to be the function of community. In Melissa’s description of and in the investments of the Best Buddies community, investments with which she does not agree, we understand that, for her, disability community serves as a place for building friendships that last, friendships bound together by a desire for disability through which new understandings of disability is produced. In Anna’s response to my opening question to tell me about the communities she is involved in, she talks about coming together with other disabled students at Accessibility Services’ orientation to talk about the problems that they might encounter as they negotiate the university’s disableist structures and attitudes, a communifying activity important to Anna but one that could also be considered to be “whining and complaining.” Reflecting on Sandra’s description of communal investments connected to her initial description of what community is, described in chapter one, we also get a sense of what Sandra hopes to gain in return for the energy she invests in community. As she describes, “community is people who value my contribution.” There is return in having one’s contribution recognized and valued.

How to secure such “safety,” to use Bauman’s (2001) word, or a space free of ableism—a space that may only last for a moment—differs between Melissa, Sandra, and Anna. Melissa believes that disability communities should be places wherein
communal members desire genuine friendships with disabled people; Anna understands disability community to be a place where she can come together with other disabled students and talk about the disabliging structures and attitudes they encounter in the university and work out ways to confront them; Sandra knows disability communities to be spaces wherein people come together to work for disability rights reform through engaging policies and antagonism. Holding in mind these stories about the different ways and reasons for putting energy into community, I now turn to engage the rub between investing in community and enacting community.

**Enactments of Community**

As my story which opens this dissertation demonstrates, I was initially drawn to thinking about how we experience community through enactments. This section thinks through how although enacting community requires desire, dedication, and labour, this way of putting energy into community, producing another way of being in the world out of desire (Munoz, 1999), is different than investing in community, as my previous section unpacks.

Before discussing how my participants describe the ways the felt and did not feel the emergence of community and how, through listening to these descriptions and attending to my own experiences of feeling community, we might think about how community is enacted, I want to briefly detail how I am thinking about the cultural phenomenon of ‘enactments.’ In her book, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*, Annemarie Mol explicates the term ‘enactment’ in order to attend to the
phenomenon of what she classifies as “illness” rather than following the medical tradition of only focusing on “disease”. I am attracted to the way Mol articulates how the meaning we attribute to a phenomenon changes and takes on a new form through the enactment generated by a particular coming together—her example, illness transforms and disease is enacted through the togetherness of the doctor and patient. I am also interested in how she suggests that togetherness, but not necessarily consensus, is required for enactment. My use of ‘enactment’ may be slightly different from Mol’s. I do not conceive of enactment as being the re-realization of something that had become dormant. It is not as though a painful leg is ‘naturally’ pain until enacted into disease, the meaning attributed to the pain forever changed. Rather, I recognize that pain is also enacted. While I agree that the coming together of the doctor and patient was required for the enactment of disease—that is, the attribution of new narrative meaning to the painful leg— their coming together was not all that was required. Recall McKittrick’s (2006) reminder that, “we produce space, we produce its meaning, and we work very hard to make geography what it is” (p. xi). Following McKittrick, we might also say that we enact space and the particular meaning that we attribute to a particular space contributes to how and what becomes enacted within them. So then, along with the particular coming together of the doctor and the patient, the geography of the doctors office and the meaning that we produce of this space (and therefore the woman’s decision to come into this space knowing what she does about how this space is made meaningful) also contributes to the new meaning attributed to the woman’s leg… the enactment of disease. Recognizing how particular spaces, along with particular configurations of coming together, are required for enactments brings me to another character of enactment that I would like to dwell on.

In Mol’s (2002) account, “disease” is an object of biomedicine whereas “illness” signifies “the person’s interpretation of his or her disease, the feelings that accompany it, the life events it turns into” (p. 9). Illness, then, could be described as one’s storying of their body. Mol (2002) writes that common to both illness and disease is interpretation and the distance between the doctor and the patient is signified by the gap between these interpretations (p. 12). Mol suggests that illness, which is tied to one’s own interpretation of the going-ons of their body (I feel ill, therefore I am ill or I hope I don’t get ill), transmogrifies into a disease only when a person (the patient) and a doctor come together in a meeting. For example, drawing loosely from Mol’s (2002) more specific ethnographic account, a woman who walks into a doctor’s office with a pain in her leg does not have a disease prior to entering the room—she interprets her leg as painful and when she (or another) recognizes the pain as something that ought to be medically assessed, she experiences this pain as illness (p. 22). The woman brings her painful leg (illness) into the interaction and the doctor, in turn, attends to it. The doctor (I will call the doctor ‘he’ for the sake of clarity) can look at and feel her leg, engage the pain, consider the illness. However, according to Mol (2002), he needs to interact with the woman in his process of attributing new meaning to the pain… to enact disease. The doctor will likely ask the woman to story her leg, prodding her with questions such as “when did it start hurting?” and “does it hurt when you walk up the stairs?” Together, and in their togetherness, the particular togetherness of the patient and the doctor, illness changes into disease…disease is enacted. This transformation is socially recognized: “I have a pain in my leg and I saw a doctor about it” is acknowledged as a story of a changing embodiment, as evidenced by the likely follow-up question, “What did they
say?” communicating, how did the meaning attributed to the pain change through your interaction? Mol (2002) is clear that the doctor themself does not bring the disease into being; rather, disease—new meaning attributed to the painful leg—is enacted by and through the collective engagement between the doctor and patient (p. 23).

Mol writes that material and historical elements are important to this enactment: The authority of the doctor; the healthcare infrastructure that makes it possible for the woman to visit him; the waiting room; the doctor’s ability and/or willingness to ask questions; the woman’s ability and/or willingness to answer them; the letter of referral; the desk; the positioning of the chairs, the doctor’s behind the desk, the patient’s in front, thus constituting the front and the back of the desk as well as one of the ways that we distinguish between the patient and the doctor (Mol, 2002, p. 23)\(^{52}\). Important, too, may be the woman’s dog whose need to be walked reminded the woman of her pain (Mol, 2002, p. 23). We could go on: the bike accident the woman had when she was a child; the doctor’s last name that stuck out to the woman when she was choosing a doctor from the directory, and so on. Although all of these elements are required to establish the scene in which the doctor and patient come together, the enactment itself—the intangible change generated between them—is necessary to bring disease into being. This disease is created between them, owned by neither. Mol (2002) does not suggest that the doctor and patient need to reach a consensual agreement about the cause or character of the disease in order to bring it into being; they need only to recognize that the other is engaged in their own process of recognition (p. 23).

\(^{52}\) These elements are taking from and extending from Mol’s list of important material and historical elements to the enactment to disease.
New meaning enacted is not static, but fleeting. Just as disease (new meaning) is enacted by and within the meeting of the two, the space they are meeting in, along with all of the historical elements that attributes particular meaning to this meeting and this meeting space, the disease can also be enacted again as pain. As the woman slips in and out of spaces, and in and out of encounters, the meaning of her leg is enacted differently, and made to mean differently. So too is the meaning of disability enacted differently from moment to moment, from encounter to encounter, and from space to space. My disability means something to myself and my others as I stand on my front porch. I turn slightly, see a man on the corner, and the meaning of disability also turns; it is made meaningful—and perhaps meaningful in a new and different way—through an enactment… and then again. Disability, then, is enacted, that is, new meaning is accomplished, all of the time. Typically in the midst of my culture in which ableist logic circulates, disability is enacted, made meaningful, as a problem in need of solution. Sometimes, though, disability is enacted differently… communally… made to be communally meaningful…

My disability lives in my body, and it means something to me. However, as disability studies tells us, particularly Michalko (1998; 1999; 2002) and Titchkosky (2008; 2007; 2003), we are never alone in our bodies. Even when I am alone, when I am lying in bed alone, for example, the meaning of disability is not solely generated by me. I lie with hauntings of pain, memories of pleasure, stories from the day before, hopes for the day ahead, tremors and shakes in my body that are not the result of the effort of my body, but happen, perhaps, in spite of my concerted effort to remain still. These hauntings, memories, stories, hopes, tremors and more never let me forget that the flows of meaning attributed to my embodiment, my disability, is never solely my own. Yet, and
also, paradoxically enough, never void of the others who inhabit them. All of these many—endless—meanings are attributed to my disability even when I am seemingly alone. When I enter into the public sphere of normative geography, the sidewalk for example, the cacophony of meanings becomes even louder. Here, my disability can quickly and seemingly easily be wielded into something other than what I make of my embodiment. On the street, disability can transform from a prideful embodied identity into a shameful state-of-affairs as the result of a trip or a fall in the midst, or with the memory, of others (Chandler, 2010). Ableist logic floods the normative geographic terrain and it maps its “sensibility”. It comes as no surprise that most often the encounters we/I have on the street, such as a look, a gesture, a comment, or a conversation that appear to be provoked by the noticing of disability, represent a normative understanding of disability, e.g., disability as lack. Through these common interactions, disability is made meaningful—enacted—in accordance to normalcy’s expectations for it. “You walk so well”, for example, only becomes “say-able” (Titchkosky, 2008) in the face of noticing a different walk, a walk that could be better, and could also be worse. In this interaction the meaning attributed to disability, although not solely owned by the commentator nor the embodier but generated in between, is the common one, that is, disability as lack. In normative geography, ‘disability as lack’ is “sensible” and, therefore, disability as anything other is typically nonsensical…. Yet, achievable. This common response to an uncommon walk enacts a normative understanding of disability. And since the normative understanding of disability is just that, an understanding, it can only exist through its enactment, a meaning made between us. These comments and the normative meanings of disability, or to borrow from Mol (2002) this “doing” of disability
that becomes enacted are, as I say, common. This simple exchange, and it is an exchange, provoked by the common comment, “you walk so well,” demonstrates how the normative understanding of disability is a doing. And this doing is frequent, and with its frequent repetition, this understanding becomes dominant, it becomes normative. Likewise such common sense enactments of disability flood the normative geographic terrain and, thus, when we encounter them, they are unsurprising.

Ableist logic circulates within and normative understandings flood our social landscape. Therefore I know that when I am traversing the social landscape, sidewalks and the like, I will be more likely to encounter enactments of disability made meaningful as a problem. This ever-present possibility, and often fulfilled, social promise has a feel. These normative enactments of disability as lack, of which I am often a part, also have a feel. Bauman (2001) writes, “Out there, on the streets, all sorts of dangers lie in ambush; we have to be alert when we go out, watch whom we are talking to and who talks to us, be on the look-out every minute” (pp. 1-2). On the space of streets, enactments of disability as violence lie in ambush. These geographies may feel unsecure, unsteady, hostile… even familiar. In these inhospitable spaces, I may feel unwelcomed, undesired, uncommon. I expect these enactments of disability as violence, but I don’t know when or where or how they will occur and, in this sense, they “lie in ambush” (Bauman, 2001, p. 1). And because being on “alert”, that is, expecting the enactment of the normative meaning of disability, feels so familiar, it feels different when disability is enacted otherwise. In contrast to feeling “insecure” on the streets, Bauman writes, “In community, […] we are safe” (2001, p. 2). Returning to my opening story in chapter one, the man on the sidewalk noticed disability, a noticing allowed for by our coming together
on the busy sidewalk. Instead of being repelled, this man was attracted to my disability, evidenced to me by his approach. I could have interpreted his question to me, “do you have trouble walking?”, as simply another enactment of a normative meaning of disability, e.g. disability as lack, disability as trouble. And I may have interpreted it as such at the time. The man’s question itself was an enactment of noticing… noticing difference. He was not asking me a question in order to discover the answer. He knew the answer; he knew the answer was yes. Indeed, this very trouble that he interpreted led him to ask the question. Nor was he asking the question in order to give me new information; he knew that I knew that my walking was troubling; we were experiencing this troubling walk together, side by side. This question was “say-able”, it made “sense” insofar as my walking appeared troubled/troubling and I appeared as one whom it was appropriate to comment on, which is how noticeably disabled people often appear (Titchkosky, 2008). Nonetheless, through our coming together—a coming together that set the scene for asking this question; a coming together constructed by him noticing me/disability, and me noticing his noticing of me—a welcomed meaning of disability was enacted. As I have said, I could have interpreted this as a normative enactment of disability as trouble. But as our conversation continued and laughter ensued between us, something changed, new meaning was built from our enactment of disability as something other than deviance, devaluation or lack. The culmination of all of this, and perhaps an unknowable ‘more’, made me feel differently in my disability than I had previously felt. I felt safe; I felt comfortable; I felt desired; I felt secure; I felt differently from how I commonly feel when I am in the normative terrain whether or not I am being ambushed or anticipating being ambushed; I felt the way that I feel when I am in my community/communal homes.
And so I was. Through our shared desire for disability, crip community was generated… if only for a moment. This example reveals how crip community was enacted within the normative geographic terrain, as is its only possibility… even structured communal homes exist within the landscape of normative geography which cannot be transcended. The enactment of community reassigns meaning to our normative geographic terrain giving us a “different sense of place” (Brand, 2009)

Similar to Mol’s account of the woman and the doctor whose coming together enacted disease, the enactment of community between the man on the street and me did not require consensus. In our short conversation, we did not reach an agreement about the meaning of disability… or maybe we did. I am suggesting, in tune with Mol, that this is not what is important. What is important is that, between us, provoked by our togetherness, the mood changed, the sensibility changed, I felt differently in my disability/disabled embodiment. Different from what, I cannot recall, but it certainly felt differently than a simple lack. And what is significant to me about this particular encounter—what felt differently— is that community was enacted when just as easily, perhaps more easily, it may not have been. Also similar to Mol’s account of an enactment of disease between the doctor and the patient is that there were many historical and material elements that contributed to setting the scene that allowed for our coming together and this enactment of a different meaning of disability to occur. That my disability was noticeable, and noticed by him; that we both happened to be walking down the same patch of sidewalk at the same time; that I was wearing high-heeled boots that accentuated my uncommon gait; that my gait was further effected by the slush on the sidewalk are all contributing elements to our coming together. Our conversation did not
seem, at least in the beginning, to be that uncommon: he asked me if I have trouble walking, which certainly could have appeared to me as a recognition in keeping with a normative understanding of disability as problem. However, throughout our conversation, our walk, and our laughter, disability was attributed new meaning… new meaning that felt differently than it could have. Feeling, then, is how I know community. Or, perhaps, I don’t know community… I feel it... I have a “different sense of place”.

Generating Feelings

Now we have two distinct ways of thinking through how we put our energy into building and sustaining disability community—investing in community and generating community through enactment (which, although a way of describing how community is produced between people, within a togetherness where desires for disability and its disruptions meet, also requires the work of seeking out, producing, and recognizing—putting energy into—generating enactments). Of being in community, Anna describes, “I think just feeling like I’m accepted in different places regardless of whether people know I have a disability or not. And I think that’s really important. Just being who you are and just being accepted.” Of experiencing the feelings generated within his community, Geoff describes,

[…] it’s like, so interesting how you can pick up or like feel what they’re [communal members] feeling, or understand what they’re saying. And you don’t, like, no one is gonna like, question you, or be like, ah <pause> it’s just, like, so, you just feel, like, a connection so much. I don’t know.
As Anna and Geoff’s descriptions of what community feels like, especially when read together, register, as much as searching out a feeling can lead us into community, feelings can also be generated and serve as a way of connecting within community. We may find community by following a feeling and in community we find new ways of feeling. In this chapter, I am compelled to follow up how ‘feelings’ generate community by thinking about how and what kinds of disability and crip communities are produced out of the different ways we desire disability.

I ended each interview by asking my participants if they had ever been surprised by where they have or have not found the emergence of a sense of community. When creating my interview questions (appendix C), it was my hope that this question would open up a discussion of the more nuanced and subtle ways that we experience community than is captured by didactic descriptions of where disability community is, where it is not, who is included and, who is excluded. In other words, reflecting back on my engagement with de Certeau’s (1999) work that ended chapter two, it was my worry that participants might use tropic, generalized, “scopic views” of crip communities in their descriptions of it and it was my hope that asking them about times that community had surprised them would lead to more elusive, even mysterious, details and feelings generated within “down below” of community. What I was surprised to discover, as is evident throughout this chapter and my previous chapter’s discussions, was that my participants were spilling with the elusive details of how community is experienced and did so from the very beginning of the interview. My concluding question served not so much as it was intended, as an invitation to begin to think of the surprising ways community emerges, disappears, and lays dormant, but, rather, an opportunity to offer final reflections on what
we were discussing throughout the interviews, the often ineffable ways we experience feeling community. I draw on my interviews in order to trace out some of the ways that community is enacted, not to provide instructions for how we might create disability community more effectively; indeed, as the stories that follow demonstrate, enactments of community can never be preemptively constructed. Rather, I offer these stories to suggest that we might be open to the ever-present possibility of coming into (and out of) community.

Throughout my conversation with Melissa, she told me how she felt estranged from the Best Buddies community for a number of reason, including that she did not share in the communal understanding of disability. Towards the end of our conversation when I asked Melissa how community felt to her, as a way to lead into a discussion about when and how she may have been surprised by community, she told me this:

I think in terms of my community, it doesn’t feel like a community. I feel like disability is seen as something that <sigh> is a nuisance, actually, it’s, it’s detrimental to people and, and, I feel like, um, those nondisabled people in my community are like, “Disability is like the pariah of society!” and, like people don’t want it. People can’t live with it.

Melissa’s articulation, that disability is understood within this community as socially undesirable, is sensible, given what we know about Best Buddies. Disability must be understood as something that gnaws away at our social fabric. It must also be understood as something people “can’t live with” in order to enact a version of buddiship which positions the nondisabled communal members who choose to “live with” disability, if even proximately, as those who ‘do good.’ Melissa understands her buddy as her friend, a
shift in understanding which also indicates that she must have shifted her understanding of disability, even if an understanding of ‘disability as pariah’ is what initially drew her to this community. I asked Melissa how she understood her friend’s (her “buddy’s”) disability in a way different than the shared understanding of disability held by the Best Buddies’ community (“disability as pariah”), and she responded:

If she didn’t have her disability—I can’t even see her as anything else because her disability makes her. Like, she is who she is because of it!

<laughs> Like, honestly, I, um, I—yeah, if she didn’t have her disability. I mean I never would have met her because she wouldn’t have been in Best Buddies. She would have—I don’t know where she would be right now!

And, um, she definitely wouldn’t be the person she is today.

We have two very different understandings of disability and there is a rub between them. Best Buddies understands disability as something, a thing with which people “can’t live,” a thing that breaks life. Melissa understands disability differently: she understands disability as a thing, too, but a thing that “makes her,” a thing that makes life. Though framed as a ‘disability community,’ Best Buddies, it seems to me, and I think to Melissa as well, is a space wherein ableist logic circulates. And this is surprising and, also, entirely believable, if not sensible. It is surprising that community could be enacted as and through interpretive conflicts regarding life and not life. Surprising, too, that through this enactment, could emerge a new way of understanding of disability, in the midst of this hostile terrain. Not only was a different kind of disability community enacted in this space but, and surprisingly, Best Buddies provoked this community. This is where Melissa met her friend and her friend would not have been here, Melissa guesses, if not
for her disability. This is another surprising rub or, perhaps, a complex tangle: disability is understood as not a life and, indeed, the taker of life (“a pariah”) in the Best Buddies community; disability brought Melissa’s friend into this community; a desire to encounter disability brought Melissa here; together, between Melissa and her friend, new meaning of disability (disability as making life) emerged. Melissa’s experience of disability community seems to me to be uncanny.

Melissa and her friend enact a way of being together that is different than the way that Best Buddies imagines that one can be with disability. As described throughout her interview, Melissa and her friend are engaged in friendship rather than buddiship. New meaning of disability is produced in and through their togetherness. And as much as their togetherness produces a new way of orienting to disability, it does so tethered to, and (hopefully) ultimately disruptive of, a normative understanding of disability, one that circulates within the Best Buddies community. I read this new meaning of disability and the way it was enacted not as a straightforwardly successful story of the overthrowing of normalcy, but, instead, as one that is more complicated. The complexity in this next story from Melissa, told to me when asked how she and her friend create community together, is demonstrative of the way that enactments of community are not always, or perhaps, not necessarily, a utopian creation.

My buddy has problems walking because she’s had hip surgery, she has problems with her hips so its really hard to get her to walk places and, um, its just, <sigh> its just a really simple thing that people take for granted—like walking. Walking is something that you learn when you’re, like, I don’t even know how old people are when they learn—like really young
<laughs> and it’s just something, like, its natural, like people think its natural, it’s like breathing and all of that, right? And I, like, like I just realized that I took it for granted before I met her, like, she has a lot of trouble walking and I just walk, and I—getting from one place to the other takes triple the time it takes me if I wasn’t with her. Like, it— <pause> it just opened my eyes to see, like okay, ‘she can’t walk there, she can’t—but she’s getting there, its not like it’s a bad thing that she takes longer to walk.’ It just, it just opened my eyes to take anything, you know what I mean? To, like not, not take— and not, not think that I’m better because I can walk somewhere and easier than she can. It’s just, it’s just a different perspective.

Melissa is describing an experience of walking together. This description is rich with understandings of the meaning and significance of walking. For Melissa, walking is “natural.” Like “breathing,” walking is something that we “take for granted.” At least for Melissa, this is something that she took for granted before meeting her friend. Her friend disrupts normalcy in so far as she has “problems walking;” specifically, it takes her “longer [than ‘normal’, than Melissa] to walk.” It may read as though Melissa is positioning her friend as ‘abnormal’ in order to relationally position herself as ‘normal’ (“getting from one place to the other takes triple the time it takes me if I wasn’t with her”). It may seem as though Melissa is using an ableist metaphor (opening her eyes) to describe the experience of, yet again, being oriented to her own normalcy through her friend…. And maybe this is what happened between them in this shared experience of walking. Yet, I am compelled to listen in between Melissa’s contradictory description:
“she can’t [walk]— but she [can].” This is a curious thing to say. In this statement, it could be that Melissa is compelled towards normalcy, she is seduced by it, and, then, she turns. Measuring her friend’s walk against a “normal” walk renders her unable to walk, for, as compelling as the idea that we can ‘do normalcy differently’ (Michalko, 2001), we cannot. Assessing something as a ‘different way of doing normal’ requires a belief in normalcy, a belief system that depends on a single, mythical, version of normalcy, one that is disrupted by the idea that there could be a multitude of normal(s). So, then, Melissa’s statement, ‘she can’t walk, but she can,’ may be indicative not only of a turning away from normalcy, but disrupting it altogether. However, I am compelled to read Melissa’s story in a way that is more complicated that simply disrupting normalcy, with intention, even if this is what it may ultimately be doing.

Melissa tells us that, for her, walking is “simple” and “natural” (according to “most people”) and doing this activity in a way different than it is typically done is “problem[atic].” If walking were “natural,” if it were ‘normal,’ then, given what we know about how normalcy is enforced, it would not be possible for her to walk and not walk at once; she would either walk or not walk. Her friend, however, walks and not walks at the same time, falling in between the dichotomy that the myth of normalcy depends on in order to maintain itself. But, by the precise way that Melissa describes her friend as doing the impossible, walks and does not walk, indicates Melissa’s resolved belief in this myth. If the myth of normalcy had been disrupted altogether, then her friend’s walk would be described differently, perhaps as another way of walking amidst a sea of different ways of getting from place to place. But this is not how Melissa described her friend’s walk. Given the choice between difference and impossibility, Melissa chooses the impossible.
This choice is still disruptive; Melissa does land on the description, “she can [walk]”. And she and her friend are walking together in difference, they are participating in an activity not anticipated by the Best Buddies community. Though not entirely abandoning normalcy to turn towards, or be seduced by, difference, Melissa and her friend, through their togetherness, did enact an understanding of disability different than the way it is typically understood in their community.

Towards the end of my interview with Anna, I asked her if she had ever been surprised by where she felt community. Explaining myself further, I told her that my research was interested in the ways that we feel a sense of community, if even for a moment, both within and outside of disability community spaces, such as the Friday Drop-In Hours. In her response, Anna told me that she had been “shocked” by the emergence of community within Accessibility Services, a space marked out as one specifically for disabled students:

I was shocked to hear there was something like disability studies that understood disability in different ways. Especially being at U of T, you know, I was terrified to come here because I was wondering as a disabled student would I get accommodations that I required, how would people treat me, like, you know, you hear all of these, like, U of T is a horrible place, it’s scary, blah, blah, blah. And then when I went and registered with Accessibility Services and encountered the transition program\textsuperscript{53} and people there were telling me about disability studies I was shocked because I’ve never heard of it before. […] And then with [a disabled

\textsuperscript{53} Transitional Year Program is an 8-month access to university program intended for adults entering university who do not have formal qualifications for university admissions (utoronto.ca/typ).
Accessibility Services counselor heavily involved in disability studies], again, I was so shocked that, you know, that he was so openly talking about his experience [of a disabled student], you know, especially being, like, a counselor. I was shocked to hear him saying all of these things because all of the other counselors are very, like, they won’t admit the problems. I feel, like, especially with Test and Exam Services, but, like, here he was just talking about it out in the open, exposing all of Accessibility Services’ dark secrets that they don’t want others to know about. Just surprises like that.

Anna was shocked, especially shocked, and then shocked again. Although, ultimately, she describes these “shocks” as “just surprises,” perhaps in response to my request for her to tell me if she had ever been surprised by community, I am compelled to consider how being ‘shocked’ is different than being ‘surprised.’ Both words are used to describe the experience of encountering the unexpected. Rather than suggesting that being surprised is usually our reaction to encountering ‘good’ things that are unexpected whereas being shocked usually indicates that we have encountered something ‘bad,’ I want to listen more carefully to Anna’s response and think through the meanings of these two words.

Surprise is usually provoked by an interaction and it usually stays there. We are surprised when we encounter something that we do not expect to encounter but when that ‘thing’ is not altogether unknown to us. For example, if I were to go to a barbecue restaurant and encounter a vegetarian option on the menu, I may be surprised. My expectations for the menu options at a barbecue restaurant, based not on a ‘truth’ of these

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menus but, rather, on my previous encounters with them, may be that they offer exclusively meat-based choices. Encountering a vegetarian option on the menu at a barbeque restaurant would be the experience of encountering something I was familiar with in an unexpected place… and this would be surprising. This surprising encounter may broaden the possibilities for what I can expect to encounter at a barbeque restaurant and it would likely influence my future expectations for such menus. However, especially as someone without much investment in barbeque restaurants and their menus, this surprising encounter would likely not radically change my understanding of the world. Though referencing past experiences and informing future expectations, this surprise was by and large provoked by this encounter and there it remained.

Given the different uses of these words, which is revealed when we attend closely to the way in which they are commonly used, being ‘surprised’ is different than being ‘shocked.’ We are surprised when we encounter the unexpected but when we are still “in place.” We are shocked when we encounter the unexpected and this encounter radically alters our understanding of the world. For example, if this same barbeque restaurant offered an item made from non-animal meat protein which the menu explained was produced through technologies of stem-cell research, the same technology that would also allow us to detect, and likely eliminate, in vitro fetuses that would turn into people who would acquire disability later in life, I would be shocked. Scanning the menu at a barbeque restaurant, I may have expected to encounter the unknown but I would not have expected that such an encounter would disrupt my sense of the world. This would not be simply an encounter with an inconsequential unknown—I did not, for example, come across a kind of soda that I did not know existed. The shock would come from not only
encountering the unknown, non-animal meat protein and the technology that produced it, but encountering new knowledge that dramatically altered my understanding of the world. This shock, unlike a surprise, would have implications that extended beyond this encounter. As a disabled person who is heavily involved in disability studies and disability rights, I am invested in what stem-cell researchers are up to, for advancements in stem-cell research have deep implications for the futurity of disabled people. This encounter, this shock, would change my understanding of the world.

Anna’s shock tells us much about her expectations for how disability would be understood at U of T. Anna’s initial shock not only came from encountering the unknown—“there was something like disability studies that understood disability in different ways”—but, “especially” from encountering this alterity at U of T, in particular, at an orientation for disabled students organized by Accessibility Services. Considering the pervasiveness of the logic of ableism under which disability is rendered a problem in need of a solution in all ways and all times, or so it may seem, encountering a different way of understanding disability through disability studies may be an experience of encountering the unknown. And the way that Anna encountered this unknown provoked a disrupted sense of space. New possibilities, new potentialities for encountering community at U of T emerged. This space, which Anna anticipated to be hostile of disabled studies, an anticipation that had not thus far been disrupted by her experiences at U of T and at Accessibility Services in particular, changed through Anna’s encounter with the Accessibility Service’s counselor who told her about disability studies. As Anna described throughout her interview, encountering disability studies and its understanding of disability as a socio-political phenomenon changed her understanding of herself as a
disabled student dramatically changed how Anna negotiated university structures and advocated for herself within them. I can understand and even relate to having such a reaction to encountering disability alterity, but the way in which Anna experienced encountering this alterity at U of T, especially at U of T, and in Accessibility Services, a place marked out as one meant to orient disabled students to the university, is curious to me. Universities are built and branded as spaces where learning happens. Encountering new ideas (understanding familiar things differently) in a university should hardly seem shocking. Understanding disability differently, though potentially radical and life changing, hardly seems to be outside of the purview of ‘big ideas’ that the university claims to be fostering. So, something else must be at play in order to make the experience of encountering a new idea at a university seem shocking.

A clue about her initial shock might lie in one of Anna’s other shocks: hearing an accessibility counselor talk so openly about his experiences of negotiating the university as a disabled student himself, which, again, Anna describes as a shocking encounter. Similar to her first two shocks, this shock may come from encountering the unexpected, which becomes unexpected when measured against Anna’s expectation for, based on her experience of, Accessibility Services. Anna’s experiences with other Accessibility Services’ counselors tell her that they “won’t admit the problems.” And, “yet here [this counselor] was, exposing all of Accessibility Services’ dark secrets that they don’t want [anyone] to know about.” Uncovering “dark secrets” was not necessarily shocking to Anna; indeed, disabling encounters at Accessibility Services may be all too familiar to her. What was shocking was that these ‘secrets of disbleism’ were “exposed” by someone working within Accessibility Services. The shock may have also been produced by the
way one of the counselors transgressed the seemingly rigid boundary between those who provide accommodation and those who need it, in his embodiment, experiences, and stories of “dark secrets.” As Anna says, “all of the other counselors … won’t admit the problems”. We only name something as a “secret,” and only something secretive can be “exposed,” if there is much work being done and much investment in keeping this information hidden. This shock of secrets exposed tells us much about the investments of Accessibility Services, which lie not in creating spaces free of disableism, disrupting how comfortable we are while encountering, witnessing, and perpetrating disableism on a university-wide level, but in keeping shrouded the many ways that this organization actively participates in maintaining a culture of ableism wherein discrimination against disabled people is not cause for alarm but is routinized. Who Accessibility Services is invested in keeping the secrets hidden from—“others,” not disabled students, like Anna—tells us more about Accessibility Services’ investments. Similar to Best Buddies, it seems as though Accessibility Services is very invested in disability, in particular, the disableist understanding of disability as a disruptive problem of education which this organization, through its accommodations based on medical documentation and the confidentiality it guarantees, can solve. Maintaining a culture of ableism, and structures and practices at U of T does reflect that this is a culture, seems like something Accessibility Services would be invested in, for their organizational life depends on it. If the culture of ableism which floods the university was challenged, then Accessibility Services, and its medicalized, individual understanding disability as a problem as well as its approach to offering a solution would also be challenged.

55 The U of T’s Accessibility Services (2009) website is rich with the description of disability defined in medicalized, individual terms. For example, in the brief description of Accessibility Services that appears
I end this chapter with one more story from Sandra which she told me in response to my request for her to tell me about a time that she was surprised (which I would now understand as “shocked”) by feeling a sense of belonging where she did not expect to. When I tell Sandra that I would love to hear her example of where she felt the emergence of community in, in Sandra’s words, “situations where there is nothing about a formal disability community,” she shares this story:

I started taking boating lessons and the person—there was nothing about disability in this context, there was absolutely nothing about disability. Everyone was supposed to be healthy, fit, you know, strong, boating, outdoorsy-types. Like, it’s not that they don’t have disability down there. You know, it’s in Toronto at the Harbour Front, you know, there is a blind sailing club… there are a lot of wheelchair people down there. You know, you know, there is an interesting shift among leisure and outdoor recreational activities, you know, some people haven’t caught up to it yet. So, it’s not that they’re unaware of it, but it’s not formally structured around a disability community. It’s an outdoorsy community, right? So, we would sometimes go on these evening outings and we’d arrive back at the dock quite late at night. And, you’re supposed to paddle your boat really fast to ram it up against this slopping dock. And it had not even occurred to me that I wouldn’t be able to see the dock at night, because my

on the main page, the services Accessibility Services provides is described as providing students with effective accommodation; the student’s responsibility is described as providing medical documentation (proof of disability), and the responsibility of Accessibility Services is described as reviewing the medical documentation and providing individualized and confidential services (accessibility.utoronto.ca/aboutus, 2014). This is clearly indicative that Accessibility Services understands disability as an individual problem which it can help to solve with individualized solutions.
vision is much less at night, I’m partially blind. And so, you know, one of these boating people that I had as a guide, they knew that I was partially blind and I had not made an issue of it beyond that, right? I had just explained, you know, ‘you need to tell me sometimes because I won’t see you gesturing.’ But, even before I had asked anyone about it, one of the guides had arranged for someone to stand on the dock with a light so that I would know where to aim my boat. And I had not even thought about this as an issue, but they had thought about it even before I had. So, for me, this is an example of how community can be enacted without a formal disability context. It’s just people being considerate or thoughtful.

Sandra begins with a description of this boating community as both having nothing to do (and everything to do) with disability. She explains that this community has “absolutely nothing to do with disability,” as she describes the expected communal members as “healthy, fit, and strong.” This description tells us much about what Sandra imagines disability to be by what it is not. We could deduce by this description that Sandra understands the disabled body as the opposite of a healthy, fit, and strong body. However, and given the context, it may be that she is describing the disabled body as one that does not “fit” here in this boating club. By Sandra’s continued description, disabled bodies do fit here, at the Harbour Front in other outdoor groups. Disabled bodies fit in groups that are designated as and take shape in the form of other outdoor groups, such as blind sailing. Disabled bodies fit, as we often do, in spaces marked out for us; spaces like “blind sailing.” Drawing again on McKittrick’s (2003) work, these spaces are workable and useful as they can be, also function as geographic containers, “calibrat[ing] and
normalize[ing] where, and therefore who, we are” (p. xi). We “fit” the expectation that we are bodies that need accommodating and, more than this, need to be accommodated in places marked out for us. While this may be true, some of the time, this kind of geographical work is pedagogical. It teaches that ours are not the kind of bodies that fit everywhere, but, there are places designated for us. This geographical work teaches that it is not expected that programs like these should structure themselves in anticipation that disabled people will show up. And it teaches that disabled people do not have a right to access the full range of (outdoor activity) possibilities; if we want to join into any of the water activities at Toronto’s Harbour Front, we must be sure that we are blind and want to go sailing. And yet, as the next part of Sandra’s story demonstrates, sometimes desire for disability can rework the normative terrain, fitting disabled bodies into spaces wherein our presence was not anticipated.

But Sandra—and disability through her—did show up. As is a common experience amongst disabled people negotiating a social world that does not anticipate that we will show up, does not open up to the possibilities that desiring disability produces, Sandra took on the responsibility of fitting herself in. By not making an issue of her blindness beyond instructing the guides that she may not see their gestures when it was dark, she was orienting them to her blindness, as something they need not think about beyond simply adjusting their normative way of orienting normative bodies. I, too, have experiences of orienting people to my disability in a way that simply requires adjusting the normative treatment of normative bodies, particularly when traversing spaces wherein I was unexpected. Like Sandra, I cannot easily slide into normative structures; my bodily differences reverberate in unexpected ways, teaching me that rather
than fit into normalcy imperfectly, my body, again and again, disrupts normalcy
altogether. Sandra did not anticipate that she would not be easily able to dock her boat
after dark; she would have to do this activity differently, collectively. Throughout her
interview, Sandra made it clear that being in charge of arranging her own accessibility is
a task that Sandra expects to always have to do, a task that she takes very seriously. In
contrast at the boating club, an outdoor activity club that “had nothing to do with
disability,” Sandra was not charged with the task of organizing her own accessibility. In
fact, she was not even required to anticipate what these needs might be. Of this gesture
Sandra told me, “It was that particular occasion where my needs were taken into account
and that just made me feel safer and included overall, right? […] It just made me feel like
it was okay for me to be down there….”. It was anticipated that Sandra would show up to
this evening paddle and included in this anticipation, and I would add, an indication that
Sandra’s participation was not just tolerated but was desired, was the consideration of
what was needed for Sandra to participate safely. Sandra needed the activity of nighttime
sailing to be accessible and safe for her in order for her to feel as if it was “okay for her to
be down there.” That the accommodation of shining a light for Sandra was made in
anticipation of her “showing up,” rather than in response to her individual request for her
individual accommodation, meant that access was collectively enacted. Together, she and
her boating instructor, oriented differently to disability and, as a result, Sandra arrived
into an anticipation of her arrival. Desiring disability produced a sense of belongingness
for Sandra (and, perhaps for her guide, as well) and a new way of arriving into disability
for, and in between, Sandra and her guide.

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I end this chapter by thinking through its opening quotation: “Queerness should and could be about another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough” (Munoz, 2009, p. 96). Drawing on this quotation, and reflecting on this work’s animating concern—the dynamics of disability and community—I want to think about how disability could be another way of being in the world, and in community specifically, and how desiring disability in the different ways that we do could produce communities that resist the dominant ways that disability is made to mean in normative culture in which ableist logic circulates. This discussion extends into my next, and concluding, chapter.

As revealed by the stories of community that this chapter takes up, it is not as if ‘good’ disability communities desire disability and ‘bad’ disability communities do not. As I have said, this revelation challenged my own understanding of crip community. Indeed, it might prove difficult to find a disability community that does not desire disability in some way. And if we take desire as a productive force, as I do, it follows that the particular ways that we desire disability produces particular kinds of community. My emphasis on how desire is productive is not an attempt to make a claim to the influence of intentionality to suggest that our intention directly creates the communities we live in; indeed, my own experience of deeply desiring a particular kind of disability community to live in, always, and acting with the intention of creating this kind community, always, but still only and always experiencing encounters with this kind of community as fleeting, though immensely pleasurable and memorable in such a way that sustains me, tells me that intentions are not productive (and desire cannot be counted on to always
produce the communal worlds we wish to live in). As my interviews reveal, the shared understandings of disability that circulate with community impacts its communal practices. More than this, the shared, communal, understanding of disability impacts who can belong and how. And because community is known through how it is felt, it follows that the way a community understands disability determines for whom the community is enacted. For example, it is not as though Best Buddies is not a disability community, or even that it is a community that does not desire disability. I am suggesting that the particular way that the Best Buddies community desires disability gives rise to the kind of community that is enacted and who can achieve feelings of belongingness within it. Best Buddies is invested in a particular meaning of disability—that disability is inherently void of the potentiality for friendship. This community is invested in this meaning, its members and practices actively work to sustain this meaning through communal practices, because they are banking on the return—the understanding that buddying up with folks lacking in the capacity to have meaningful relationships is demonstrative of a benevolent character and desirable to future employers. This effects who can belong to this community and how.

Sandra’s story about her experience on her evening paddle tells a different story about how we put energy into community and, relatedly, how we experience it. Both Sandra and the paddling guide put energy into community. The way they put energy into the community was different than investing in it. They were putting energy into community not with the expectation of a return, but still with the hope (rather than intention) of producing something. The paddling guide was expecting Sandra to show up, and it seems to me, and likely Sandra, too, that she was glad she did. In the paddling
guide’s expectation that disability, through Sandra, would show up to the nighttime paddle, he anticipated that there would be a disruption to the normative, in this case, disabling, practice of docking boats after the paddle in the dark. The guide could have oriented to this disruption in a number of ways. He could have expunged the possibility of this disruption altogether, forbidding Sandra from attending the nighttime paddle. He could have ignored the possibility of this disruption, leaving it to Sandra to figure it out on her own, charging her with the task of arranging her own accommodation, a task with which Sandra is familiar. In the midst of all of these possibilities, the guide oriented to disability with desire. He desired disability, Sandra, to show up, he welcomed its disruption, and this desire provoked him to change the normative terrain of the nighttime paddle. The act of shining a light so that Sandra knew where to point her boat is not in and of itself an indication of desire, although it could have been an indication of intention. Even if the guide had arranged for someone to shine the light with the intention of guiding Sandra, if this act was a gesture that felt hostile, a different kind of community would have been enacted. However, regardless of this guide’s intention, he acted in a way that provoked Sandra to feel welcomed, as she described. Sandra did not tell me anything more about the boating club and, so, we do not know if this community was sustained over time. My best guess, informed by my own experiences of community, suggests that it was not. For a moment, though, Sandra felt belongingness, a feeling generated by the desire for disability and all of its disruptive possibilities. Thus, through this feeling, community, crip community, was enacted.

We may only be able to orient to instances wherein feelings of belongingness are generated, and the enactments of crip community they might provoke, as the ever-present
possibility of encountering the unexpected. From these stories we can gather that the way we desire disability may be dramatically different and, correspondingly, the particular ways we desire disability produce a particular kind of community. These communal stories also teach us that, much like the character of disability, community is produced between us, and between us and the social, in shaky, unpredictable, and never steady ways. Like disability, too, enactments of community may turn up in unexpected places and they may surprise and even shock us. The communities that we generate between us may not last, they may be fleeting, we may find community and lose it again in a moment; feelings, we know, are curious things that we move in and out of, all of the time. Just when we think a feeling has left us forever, or maybe after we have long forgotten the experience of what a feeling feels like, we may find it again. Or not. Known through a feeling, community is just as dependable and undependable.
Chapter Five: Narrating Crip Futures

The spoken word is a gesture and it’s meaning, a world.

-- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 165

_All eyes are on her and she casts her eyes down. They are close enough to touch her, but no one does. When asked, she lunges her bum up onto the table and scoots back. She is already out of breath. She tries to spin around in order to lie down, as instructed, but tips over, falling onto her left side, onto her elbow, and her head curls into her neck. She pauses in this position for a moment or two and tries to catch her breath. The big bolder in her stomach has slid all the way to her left side and she is trying with all of her energy and reserve, to make the bolder slide into the right slide of her stomach, which is her trick for regaining her balance. It takes several moments of intense concentration for her stomach muscles to grab hold of this bolder and slide it uphill, against gravity, and it seems to everyone else like nothing is happening, like she might stay in this position, teetering on her elbow for a very long time. But something is happening. Finally, she feels the bolder loosen, she feels her stomach muscles pulling the bolder upwards, and with a low, long grunt, the bolder finally shifts to the right side of her stomach, and she rocks back up onto her bum. She hears bodies shift in reaction to this sudden movement. This movement is the result of a spasm, they might be thinking, an involuntary, out-of-control movement that just happened to put her body back in place. An ‘involuntary movement’ that took every ounce of intention, strength, concentration, and will that she could muster up. As she stretches her legs out, the thin paper gown fluttered atop her_
tremors and heaving chest, trying to catch some breath, sticking to large patches of sweat all over her body. She squints her eyes against the florescent bulb of the examining table beaming down at her. “Now its time to get to work,” she hears someone above her say.

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I didn’t expect to be so moved when my friend, who is more than just a friend, asked me to read her disability studies assignment, a story, but I was. She was asked to describe an appearance of disability and she told a story of our many walks together, walks we often share with her bicycle, which she chooses to walk rather than ride. In my friend’s story, she described the immense comfort the familiar sound that my dragging foot brought to her. She described noticing the many looks that my body elicits, or I suppose, that we elicit together, and how, sometimes she wondered if I always noticed them, and how she wanted to shield these looks from me, absorb the sting of the stare herself, for just a little while. She also wrote how she didn’t always know if these looks were looks of curiosity or disgust, or if the onlooker was checking me out. Maybe they were just looking at how the three of us, me, her, and her bicycle, were taking up the sidewalk.

This was not her story of how I walk, it was her story of how we walked together. Whether I am walking by myself or with others, I always feel alone when I am walking. The stares—and I do notice them, well, maybe not all of them—make me feel alone. Sometimes I feel guilty when my walking partner gets caught in the crossfire. But for the first time, reading her story, I could think about walking together, with someone else
noticing, with pleasure, my dragging foot through its familiar sound. Noticing, with anger, or even tired ambivalence, the barrage of stares that are a part of my, and our, daily walking routine. Desiring, out of love, to catch some of these stares before they hit me, knowing that they still did. I realized for the first time that these parts of walking, which had become all-too-familiar to me had become all-too-familiar to someone else too.

My vulnerability comes from the ever-present possibility that my dragging foot could catch a crack in the sidewalk and I could trip, fall, laying out on the sidewalk, often balancing on my left elbow with my head curled into my shoulder. When this happens I stay down there for a while. Sometimes a group of eyes stare down at me. I imagine them wondering, “should we touch her?” When is she going to get up?” Once, someone stepped over me as though I was a box that had blown onto the sidewalk, one more obstacle to negotiate. When I am down on the sidewalk, as an obstacle or a spectacle, my joy comes from the deep knowing that I will move that bolder inside of me, I will pull it up hill, against gravity, and this pulling will rock me back up to the centre of my balance, in my own time, with my own strength.

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This dissertation has been told through stories, narrating disability and the desire for community as I go. These stories bring with them a sense of trouble. Throughout, at various points, I have taken up the trouble with explanatory stories, ‘origin stories.’ Chapter one engaged the trouble with telling disability stories, thinking through what Garland-Thomson (2007) refers to as the way, “shape [disability] structures stories” (p.
Chapter one thought through the way that disability structures story suggesting that, when interpreted through ableist logic, the disabled body demands an origin story. Disability is a disruption to the normal and natural corporeal state of affairs and, as such, we, disabled people, are called upon to explain our differences through origin stories, lest they be storied for us. In the act of noticing difference—and for the way it disrupts, disability certainly startles such a noticing—we engage in the act of narrating difference, a narration through which we produce a disability story…perhaps at the same time as we are seeking one out. I desire stories of disability; this work was produced out of such a desire. Disability stories can be wondrous, creative, nuanced, and productive, producing new meanings of disability, its connection to geography, and sometimes, even community itself. I desire disability stories which produce new meaning of disability for the way they rub against origin stories, which are elicited through the cultural requirement to explain disability. Reflecting on chapter two, we know that stories of disability often take a tragic shape and may be called upon to animate a call to stop environmental devastation. We also know, as explicated in chapters two, three, and four, that stories can bring, “a different sense of place” (Brand, 1999), bringing new sense to geography and the people who are placed on or place themselves in particular environments. Stories do not allow us to transcend the normative terrain, but through stories we can unwork and rework normative, ableist culture. Further along in this concluding chapter, I continue to unpack the ways in which disability is storied as ‘no life’ and, specifically, ‘no future,’ within discussions of what Puar (2011) refers to as “liberal eugenic practices,” such as pre-natal testing and juvenile euthanasia (p. 153).
The trouble is not narrations of disability, nor is it even the desire for disability to be storied. And the trouble is certainly not that disability stories are quieted or left untold… they are pervasive. The trouble with disability stories, as this dissertation demonstrates, is that, “amidst the thunder” (King, 2003, p. 21) of ableist disability stories, different disability stories, stories by disabled people and stories of crip communal enactments which story disability in a nuanced, contradictory, joyful, and painful multiplicity, “have no place or purchase” (King, 2003, p. 21) in normative geography. They get told, as King (2003) says, and then forgotten (p. 21). Forgetting such stories is not heedless nor is it inconsequential. There is tremendous cultural investment in maintaining categorical abnormalcy, investment that informs the dominant ways that we desire disability. And so telling stories of disability informed by ableist logic is pleasurable, insofar as this act of telling performs the social work of sustaining the fictitious but powerful category of normalcy. Narrating disability differently than the origin of a problem or as a cautionary tale, desiring disability as we do, produces new possibilities for life with disability and crip futures. Such ‘different stories of difference’ also creates new meanings of geography by how these stories give rise to new ways of orienting to the nuanced and multiplicitous ways that disability and geography are produced by and through one another. These are stories of, and generated out of, disability community.

As I begin the ending of this work, I am faced with another trouble— the trouble with ending stories. Just as the trouble with origin stories is their tendency to turn (or be turned) toward the realm of the explanatory, concluding stories can often drift into a didactic realm, summarizing the arguments for the reader and giving instructions for what
lessons can and should be gleaned from them. To resist such a temptation, but to still end on a reflective note, I engage the two stories that open this chapter as a story-listener as a way to think through what new meaning is generated particularly for the ways that we are together with disability in the world. As I treat all stories in this dissertation, I do not judge these stories as ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ Rather, I turn to Merleau-Ponty (1945), who writes, “The spoken word is a gesture and it’s meaning, a world” (p. 165). If these two stories, like all stories entered into the world (through speech or otherwise), is a gesture, perhaps many gestures, what meanings of and for the world does it produce? As I engage these two stories, I think about how telling stories and listening to stories is productive. This is in line with my exploration carried out throughout this dissertation of how telling and listening to stories about the enactment of crip community is, indeed, productive of community and, in this way, reflective of a narrative commitment.

After offering some reflections on this dissertation through the two stories that open this chapter, I engage the themes of disabling futures and crip futurity more specifically and, in this way, I take up Kafer’s (2013) call for disability studies to enter into theoretical discussions about time, temporality, and futurity (p. 27), beginning by grappling with the ways that disability has been and continues to be represented as a site of “no future,” or “no good future.” I turn to some of the ways that stories about the interaction between disability and futurity are told through ableist logic and, in this way, produce disabling effects thereby sustaining ableism. Following this, I offer some thoughts about how, in the midst of a culture which imagines disability as ‘no life,’ we can imagine a crip futurity that is produced from the ways we desire disability in crip community and how we story these enactments.
Producing and Productive Stories

Recall the two stories that opened this chapter. These stories, like the one that opened chapter one of walking with a man while I was wearing high-heeled boots, was generated out of my experiences of crip community, from which I form my understanding of how such communities should feel. Also similar the story that opened chapter one, my storying of these two encounters, and the feelings produced within them, was my attempt to enact community, even when storying where community is not. I could have storied these encounters in many different ways: bad doctors, rude pedestrians, inhospitable geographies, and friends who, for all of their ‘good intentions,’ do not change the feelings of “unbelongingness” (Brand, 2001) which come from being in the normative terrain. But these stories, and my listening to them, generate new and different meanings, meanings that have implications for how we ‘know’ community and how we live together with disability. In this way, as I have been explicating throughout this work, how we story and how we ‘know’ are bound up, meaning-making processes.

I wrote these two stories in response to a writing exercise I received while participating in a series of theatre workshops. These workshops occurred within a disability community, one in which the enactment of the feeling of belongingness, which generates the feeling of community, while not guaranteed, occurs with reliable frequency. This is a community wherein the enactment of community fails. But different than most
I think, when crip community fails to be enacted here, this failure is collectively felt. The exercise that prompted, quite literally, these stories was a ‘free fall,’ in which we were asked to write for twenty minutes without editing ourselves. In this spirit, the two stories that open this chapter are copied straight from my notebook page, unedited. We are always story-listeners to our own stories as we continue to tell them.

Recalling de Certeau’s (1984) work presented in chapter two, our stories may even be illegible to us as we move in the “down below” (p. 249) as story-listeners we engage with the storytellers, even when we are the teller, in the collective act of meaning-making. As I take up this “compelling invitation” (Dion, 1999, p. 17) to think about the communal meaning that the two stories that open this chapter generates, for me and for us at this time, I am caught by how, although I did not write them with this dissertation in mind, it was clearly on my mind. And so, as I, a story-listener, meet myself, a storyteller, and meet you, a story-listener too, my reading of these two stories is shaped by a desire to reflect on the communal stories that have unfolded throughout this dissertation, particularly for how these stories, like those that came before it, unwork and rework meanings of geography.

The first story opens with a scene of disability togetherness. This is the kind of togetherness and geographic placement one might expect a disabled person to have: splayed out on an examining table surrounded by doctors and nurses, fumbling—failing—to ready themselves for examination. This person is in a hospital, a “geographic container” (Solnit, 2011) culturally understood to be the proper place for disability and disabled people to be. The person in this story is describing the feeling of being alone in the midst of others, a togetherness. As I am the person in this story, I can say with
confidence that in this narrative scene the feeling of being alone was tightly bound up in the experience of being together. Charged with the task of lying down while alone, without others in the room, I would have experienced my body and this space very differently. I cannot say how the others in the room experienced this togetherness, but I do know that my movements—controlled and uncontrolled—moved them. In this story I was faced with a demand to generate a particular movement. In the face of this demand, I funneled every ounce of energy and intention that I could muster into provoking a shift. And while I did eventually move in response to this demand in an off-beat, off-centre, imperfect, even grotesque way, it cannot be said for sure that the movement was a result of my concerted efforts (although I feel that it might have been). My efforts to move something—my body, of which I have a most intimate knowledge—were not interpreted as intentional by the others in the room, so says my interpretation of their reaction to me and, thus, my particular storying of this togetherness. Regardless of my intention, or their interpretation (or my interpretation of their interpretation), something did move…I moved.

In the second of the two stories that open chapter five, I narrate my experience of reading a story written by a friend about her experience of walking with me. This is a story of us walking together with a bike in the midst of others in a normative, ableist, geographic terrain in which I feel perpetually out of place. And reading my friend’s story of walking together with me gave me a new understanding of our togetherness on the streets. As I say in my story of reading her story, this is not her story of how I walk and it is certainly not an explanatory story for my walk. It is her story of how we walk together. And, in this sense, it is our story of how we are in the world together with disability. My
friend identifies as nondisabled, is recognized as nondisabled, and, even when we are together, she does not experience ableism directly, although she does, of course, experience it through me. And I experience disability through her. My experience of disability and/on the land changes when we are together. She and I enact crip community through our togetherness and for me this produces, if briefly, a “different sense of place” (Brand, 1999). We know this and remark on it often. I know, and sometimes become embarrassed because, she notices the stares my body out-of-place and out-of-control elicits. As I said in my story of reading hers, I sometimes become ashamed that my friend’s body, too, is stared at since her body is proximal to mine and both of us are perceived through an ableist gaze. Before reading my friend’s story, I did not know that she wondered if I noticed the stares. I never would have guessed that she attempts to shield these stares from me— these ableist “ambushes” that jolt me with their reminder that the world is insecure (Bauman, 2001). Her intention to change the meaning and my experience of disability by shielding me from these stares was and still is lost on me. Her intention does not have its intended effect; I still feel these stares penetrating when we are together; her witnessing them may even make them feel heavier. But this does not mean that the experience of disability remains unchanged or that community is not enacted when we are together. Different than an intention, her desire to be with disability and the comfort and familiarity brought on by the way that disability disrupts— made manifest through my dragging foot—is productive. Her desire, my desire, and our desire, enact community. And through this enactment, I feel differently in my body and in the world. The community enacted does not produce a new world; following McKittrick (2006, p. xi), we cannot transcend the normative terrain. The community enacted produces a new
way of feeling, thus being, in the world. Before reading my friend’s story, I did not know that she noticed the sound of my dragging foot (unlike the stares, this sound is something I do not notice, even though I am non-d/Deaf). I would have never guessed that this sound, this could-be irritating and certainly disruptive to the normative aural order sound, brings her comfort by its familiarity. For her, this sound, this disruptive sound, signified our being together. In this way, she desired this disruption, the way that disability disrupts. And this desire, though unspoken, generated a feeling that changed our experience of being in the world together. It is not as though her desire to be with disability and all of its disruptions suddenly produced the feeling of being at home in the world; the stares still stung. This community enacted does not stay with us. We may come into and out of community many times in the course of our walk; this community is fleeting. This community cannot be counted on as a steady home. We cannot advertise or publicize it nor can we create guidelines around it for how others can similarly create community.

In my story of my reading of my friend’s story of walking with me, we both narrate our feelings and, in so doing, contribute to the meaning made of where community is felt and where it is lost. As I have demonstrated throughout this work, the way we narrate feelings, particularly feelings of togetherness and estrangement, gives rise to particular conceptions of community. Through the act of narrating feelings into the social, as I am doing here, we can enact community… it is my desire to enact community and to witness the new meanings—new meanings of crip futures—such desire produces.

The character of my disability is such that I disrupt wherever I go. My dragging foot, the same one that brings my friend comfort, can also get tripped up in a crack of the
sidewalk causing me fall down. When this happens, I have to move myself by pivoting off of my elbow, as I did on the examining table. Depending on who is around this action feels differently. The body on the examining table and the body on the street is the same body, my body. In both storied experiences, the body is in and of the world with others (and thus not the same body). In the first story, the togetherness of the people in the room along with its geography produces a particular meaning of disability. My moving body becomes an abject, out-of-control body. I cannot be sure how the others in the room were experiencing my body and how my body, as well as our togetherness, changed the space, but I do know how I felt. And through my narrating of this feeling, and through your attention to this narration, we give rise to a meaning of disability (out of control) and a particular way of being together (feeling alone in the midst of togetherness). Together, through storytelling and story-listening, we produce meaning collectively.

I could have storied this experience of being on the examining room table differently and, in so doing, given rise to a different set of meanings. In this story, I could have guessed at the intention of the doctors surrounding me, telling you that they did not help me lie down on the table because they wanted to give me the freedom and independence to complete this movement independently in an act of benevolence, which is not foreign to me and lots of other disabled people. I could have storied this encounter in a way that figured the doctors as desiring disability and the disruption that it made and that they were compelled to look at my body for the pleasure it’s crippled movements elicited. And you, the story-listener, could have accepted this story… or not. In the midst of endless interpretive and narrative possibilities, I chose to story this encounter animated
by how I felt in the room with others, or, more precisely, based on how I remember
feeling.

Through my feelings, I describe more than how I felt on the examining room

table—more than how it felt to have those eyes on me and move the bolder in my

stomach. My feelings set the scene, figure the characters, and plot out the action. “Eyes

casting down” could have become “eyes looking on,” which would have given rise to a
different set of meanings. My feelings not only narrate how I felt, but how I was in the

world with others. My feelings storied the characters and how they interacted with me. I

could have storied this encounter in a way that produced community between the doctors

and me, given that, as I assert throughout this work, feeling are all that are needed to

produce community. But I did not feel community in this interaction. In this particular

geography with these particular people, I did feel like my disability was desired, but only

as a living reminder of abnormalcy. The feelings produced in this interaction were not

generative of community. And so, I did not (desire to) produce a communal story of this

encounter.

The second story, the story of my reading of a friend’s story of her experience of

us walking together features the same body, my body, together with others. The feelings

generated in this social encounter are multiplicitous; they oscillate between shame,

embarrassment, anger, comfort, joy, and more. These feelings—specifically the way I

narrate these feelings—give rise to a different meaning of disability. It is difficult for me
to say what these different meanings are, in part because the meanings are shifting and

are generated through a collective of which you, the listener, is a part… the disability

may be mine but it’s meaning is ours. And because this is not an explanatory story, the
specific meaning produced of disability is not my concern. What I find interesting in the
story of my reading of my friend’s story, especially in the context of thinking through
how stories are productive and what they produce, is how meaning was generated
collectively, between the storyteller and the story-listener and, in this sense, the meaning
of disability is culturally produced in the midst of others. On this walk, which my friend
was narrating and I am narrating now, I experienced being stared at as an ableist ambush,
ambushes which I encounter frequently when I traverse the normative terrain. Such
ambushes often produce feelings of estrangement, wielding me into nothing more or less
than a body out-of-control and out-of-place, reminding me, yet again, that the meaning of
disability is produced in the midst of others. During my walk with my friend, I may have
felt thrown out-of-place by these stares but as I was, I was not alone. As evidenced by the
feeling of shame I experience when I notice my friend being stared at when we are
together and also becoming thrown out-of-place. We are both thrown out-of-place
together and this changes how this experience feels for both of us. Despite the ever-
present possibility of being thrown out-of-place when we walk together, a possibility that
she likely does not walk with when she is not with me, she still walks with me. In our
walks, my friend experiences how the ways others make sense of disability, how the way
they story this difference through ableist logic, can provoke ambushes. She also
experiences how, at the same time, disability can also produces pleasure (comfort and
familiarity). This is a different story of difference producing new meaning of disability.
In the midst of all of these possibilities that disability gives occasion for, my friend
desires to be with disability and we, together, enact crip community. It is not as though
enactments of crip community guard against ableist ambushes; crip communities do not
forever change the feeling of the normative terrain. Rather, such enactments change how such encounters feel. In my experience, being thrown out-of-place together feels differently than being thrown out-of-place alone feels. I still may feel a sense of “unbelonging” (Brand, 1999) on the street when I am with her and, but sometimes, and at the same time, I feel a sense of belonging with her, in crip community. Enactment of crip community changes the way the normative, ableist terrain feels. The story above puts into motion this way of knowing the experience of being in community.

The stories generated in my interviews, as discussed throughout chapters three and four, demonstrate how, although there are many different kinds of structured disability communities, communities are known through feelings of belongingness. In this way, communities are enacted. The two stories that opened this chapter, along with all other stories of community collected in this dissertation, demonstrate how the way that community is known is generated, perhaps even sustained, through stories. We may feel a sense of belongingness through a feeling and, through this feeling, enact community. The way we chose to story, or not story, feelings generated, is another enactment of community; stories are productive. In the second of the stories that opened this chapter, I could have storied this experience in a number of ways. I could have storied my friend’s desire to shield the stares from me as an act of benevolence rather than an act of solidarity. To me, benevolence feels differently than the feeling of being with someone in solidarity. If I had storied our walk as an experience of being with someone through benevolence, regardless of the particularities of the walk, crip community would not have been produced. However, through my listening to this story, which narrated her desire to be with disability, I did and do feel crip community with her within and in resistance to
(even in the absence of) ableist ambushes…the words of her story gesturing toward a world of crip community possibilities. I felt community, which is how I storied this walk and, in so doing, produced community. More than making meaning of community, telling and listening to communal stories produces community.

**Disabling Futures**

I end this work on disability stories by dwelling in stories of disability into the future. Kafer (2013) writes that in many ways, we conceptualize disability temporally: “‘chronic’ fatigue, ‘intermittent’ symptoms, and ‘constant’ pain are all ways of defining illness and disability in and through time; they define disability in terms of duration” (p. 24). At the same time, Kafter (2013) says, disability has also been framed in curative terms: we, disabled people are out of time; we are disruptive to (normatively progressing, developmental) time (p. 25). Our culture is replete with stories of how disability snuffs out all possibilities for future life and so, as we think about crip futures, we must also attend to the ways that disability crips futurity. In his paper *Blinding the Power of Sight*, Michalko (2011) writes, in conversation with Frederic Jameson (2003), “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than a different one” (para 1). Different than Jameson, who talks about the end of capitalism, Michalko (2011) thinks through all of the many ordinary ways that our culture tells us that it is easier to imagine the end of a life than a life with and through disability, eliding possibilities in and of difference. Pregnant women and those close to them are routinely counseled to abort their disabled fetuses⁵⁶;

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mothers, fathers, and caretakers murder their disabled children (and often met with
compassion in the court system)\footnote{Refer to Michalko, R. (2002). \textit{The Difference that Disability Makes} and McGuire, A. (In Press)}; assisted suicide is culturally understood as an
appropriate response to acquiring disability later in life\footnote{Refer to Donald Low’s plea for ‘death with dignity’: \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3jgSkxV1rw} (2013) and Catherine Frazee’s response to Low’s assertion that life with disability was not a dignified one and, therefore, no life at all: \url{http://www.cbc.ca/playerShows/ID/2408580082/} (2013).}; ‘I’d kill myself if I was blind,’
casually slips off of the tongue (Michalko, 2011).

As Michalko (2011) posits in his skilled reading of these everyday occurrences,
which are anything but incidental, that all of these occurrences remind us that death is
more imaginable, more desirable, than disability. Indeed, disability is culturally
recognized as a site of no future, or, at best, the site of an undesirable future. With
Michalko, I suggest that the difference of disability is understood as being void of
possibility and, bound up in this understanding, disability is imagined as no life at all.

From this understanding, ‘crip community,’ that is, desiring to be with disability and
attending to what such desire produces, is rendered inconceivable. As a way of orienting
to the possibility of crip futurity, provoked both by Michalko’s thoughts and this ongoing
discussion of community, I first attend to some of the ordinary ways that disability is
rendered a living ends, specifically, a site of no future.

As much as it is undesirable, the possibility of a disabled future is threatening.
Reed Cooley’s article, “Disabling Spectacles: Representations of Trig Palin and
Cognitive Disability,” offers an analysis of the rub between the way that Sarah Palin uses
disabled children, including her son, Trig, throughout her 2008 presidential campaign in
order to craft herself as benevolent and strong in her pro-life convictions while at the

same time failing to imagine the disabled adults within the healthcare and education policies in her platform. Throughout his article, Cooley (2011) reveals how disabled people, particularly cognitively impaired people, are not often imagined as moving—“progressing”—into adulthood; moving into the future. As Cooley (2011) writes, disabled people are imagined to be, “futureless when we fail to imagine that their disabilities might last beyond childhood and when the policies for which we make room rest on this failure” (pp. 305-306). The prospect of the disabled adulthood represents a threat within neoliberal times, a time when the responsibility of caring for (disabled) people is downloaded from the state to the individual or the family (Harvey, 2006).

Disabled people living in an ableist and disabling culture often require care. While caring for (disabled) children within the realm of the family is normalized within our culture, the prospect of a disabled adult requiring care outside of the family becomes threatening to our neoliberal sensibilities. In this way, and similar to the construction of queer people as described throughout Lee Edelman’s work (2004), disabled people are constructed as having, and therefore being, markers of “no future” at the same time as we are imagined to threaten the future (Cooley, 2011, pp. 279-280).

We know that we do not easily orient to disabled futures by the arbitrary ‘death count’ that many of us receive as children (and live past as adults): ‘She won’t live past 16’; from approximations at our ‘mental age,’ ‘She has the mind of a 8 year old;’ to the more dramatic and violent rejection of our future, found in the example of ‘Ashley X.’ Ashley X was a cognitively impaired girl whose parents had her breasts removed and subjected her to a complete hysterectomy at the age of 10, a medical procedure which has come to be known as the ‘Ashley Treatment.’ This decision was motivated by Ashley’s
parents’ will to keep their daughter’s physical age consistent with her so-called ‘mental age,’ a will to keep their daughter young, desexualized, vulnerable, and without futurity. In this example, there is a clear belief in a ‘mental age’ and a clear desire for it to be in line with a physical body (thereby holding apart the mind and body as two separate categories). Much can and is made about the case of Ashley X in disability studies.

Kafer’s (2013, pp. 47-68) reading of Ashley X and the Ashley Treatment, how Ashley was always already “out of time” in a number of ways, including how her construction as “frozen in time” casts her as “out of time,” thereby provoking the violent and drastic treatment that has become her namesake intended to keep her mind and her body in line, and in this way, in line with her time (Kafer, 2013). Ashley X, as her nickname “Pillow Angel” demonstrates, is perpetually tied to childhood and estranged from, as she is undesirable to, the future. The temporal undesirability of disability is intimately bound up in its sexual undesirability, as the “Ashley Treatment” demonstrates.

More than being void of the potentiality to live into the future, and a further indication that we pose a threat to the future, can be found in how disabled people are represented as being unable to reproduce and, in this way, and similarly to queer people, unable to carry on into the future. Disabled sexuality is largely regarded as unproductive as we, disabled people, are so often infantilized, and thereby recognized as non-sexual, hypersexual (with an out-of-control and, depending on how our disability is clarified, sexually dangerous), or sexually incapable. As the case of Ashley X and the Ashley Treatment demonstrates, the construction of disabled futurity and disabled sexuality are intertwined. The failure to imagine the “reproductive futurism” (Cooley, 2011, p. 315) is

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more than simply indicative of a failure of imagination. Such failure curbs the rights and legitimacy of people, namely disabled people and queer people who, through a tangle of discourse and materiality, are socially produced as people posing a threat to the future social order. Through this eradication of our sexuality, a process than can also produce (some of) our sexualities as out-of-control and abject, we are, yet again, produced as culturally undesirable through our production as sexually undesirable. The imagination of our disabled bodies as sites and sources of pleasure is grotesque and what this corporeal togetherness produces—satiation in and through difference or eventually children—is threatening, the threat being that we will reproduce ourselves—a disabled future. A future that we are not capable of caring for as impaired people and a future that no one would desire, similar to how Edelman (2004) describes of a queer future as figured as (reproductively) impossible and undesirable. In so many ways, disability and disabled people are rendered out of place, and disruptive to place, here and now and into the future.

Crip Futures

In so many ways, disability is culturally rendered as undesirable and a site of no future. And because the meaning made of disability is always connected to how we

60 There is much debate over the capacity of disabled people to consent to sex. A recent example of this is the criminal charges against Anna Stubblefield, a professor at Rutgers University, accused of sexually assaulting a man with Cerebral Palsy (the man was not her student but did participate in one of her research studies.) Stubblefield describes that they had consensual sex. Flaherty, C. (April 23, 2014). Question of Consent. Inside Higher Education. Retrieved from: http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/04/23/rutgers-philosophy-professor-accused-sexually-assaulting-disabled-research-partner#sthash.oNZD1Vt3.dpbo on June 15, 2014.
experience it, in a figuration akin to a Mobius strip\textsuperscript{61}, these renderings contribute to the way that we experience everyday life within a geography where the possibility of being ambushed by and through ableist encounters is heavy. Cooley (2011), in conversation with Edelman (2004), connects the failure to recognize disabled life as a desirable life with the importance of attending to crip futurity, imagined or otherwise (p. 315).

Provoked by Cooley’s observations and my steadfast belief that the meaning of disability is produced in culture and can therefore always be produced otherwise, as I move forward in this ending I think about how narratives of crip community, and the new meanings of disability they generate, can propel us into the future.

Discussions of futurity are currently occupying the academic landscape. Scholars like Edelman (2004), as his book title suggests, is calling for us to think about a “no future” because of the limiting discourse of futurity and the limited meaning such discourses produce of our bodies. Certainly, as my discussion above demonstrates, discourses of futurity so-often make disability into a ‘living ends,’ the site of no future.

And so I understand the impulse to turn away from discussions about futurity (especially one’s that are sustained by notions of progression, which are dangerous to understandings of disabled life). But I also think carefully with Munoz (2009, p. 95) as he says, because of how the future, imagined through children who are reproductions of the desired norm, is always already white and straight, for the queer of colour body, imaginations of futurity, even utopias, must be invoked as a way to keep on living. This is particularly

\textsuperscript{61} Throughout her book \textit{Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism}, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) uses the figure of the Mobius strip as a way of revealing the, “inflection of mind into body and body into mind, [for] the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another” (p. xii). Grosz (1994) writes that such a model also, “provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside (p, xii).
important in the midst of discourses that, in multiple ways, understand the queer of colour body as no life, and thus threaten queer of colour lives (Munoz, 2009, p. 95). In conversation with Eldelman’s (2004) articulation of “no future,” and attending to the pervasive and nuanced ways that disability is figured as the antithesis of future, certainly of a ‘good,’ progressive future, Kafer (2013) writes, “I can see clearly how futurity has been the cause of much violence against disabled people, such that ‘fuck the future’ can seem like the only viable crip response” (p. 31). And yet, as Kafer (2013) follows up, in a way consistent with Munoz’s response to Eldelman’s call, with the assertion that, “these very histories ultimately make such a refusal untenable” (p. 31). “‘Fucking the future’ takes on very different valence for those of us who are not supported in their desire to project themselves (and their children) into the future in the first place” (Kafer, 2013, p. 31).

Along these lines and further engaging Edelman’s argument, Munoz (2009) writes that,

It is important not to hand over futurity to normative white reproductive futurity. That dominant mode of futurity is indeed ‘winning,’ but that it is all the more reason to call on a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place: a “not-yet” where queer youth of color actually get to grow up. pp. 95-96.

As I move forward in this ending, I reflect on the above quotation along with Munoz’s (2009) quotation that opened chapter four: “Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough” (p. 96). I think about these quotations in relation to my
ongoing question, which is, how are enactments of crip communities productive and what does the act of telling and listening to stories of crip community produce?

Following Munoz (2009, p. 96), if queerness should and, indeed, can be about, “a desire for another way of being […] in the world,” how might the desire for disability not only change how we experience disability in the world but change the meanings with which we infuse the world, its geographies, landscapes, and environments? This is, of course, a delightfully unanswerable question, but one for which we can turn to stories to think through how narrating disability in and with crip community gives shape to us in/and the world, given that these enactments and their stories do not create a new world but gesture towards new possibilities for being shaped in the world? Kafer (2013) asks, “Can claiming crip be a method of imagining multiple futures, positioning ‘crip’ as a desired and desirable location regardless of one’s own embodiment or mental/psychological process?” (p. 13). I take also Kafer’s provocation as a call to imagine how we can desire a crip future by crafting out how we might reinvigorate, rather than turn away from, ideas of futurity through crip communities, enacting them with a desire to be with disability into the future. I respond to Kafer’s call to imagine a crip futurity otherwise, suggesting that enactments of crip community might provide (imaginary) places through which we can not only imagine, but productively crip futurity, perhaps a future that “crips” the arch of progression that futures’ are meant to engender (Kafer, 2013, p. 27). I also think about Clare’s account of being in crip community at the Not Dead Yet protest, described in chapter one, where Clare (1999) describes watching Sean, a six year old boy with CP, wearing a ‘Crip Cool’ cap, riding his power chair around a protest with a bunch of other crips (p. 127). As he watches, Clare (1999)
describes that, “Sean could have been another Tracy Latimer, a twelve-year-old girl with severe Cerebral Palsy, killed by her father, who said he did it to end her unbearable suffering” (p. 127). Clare is articulating, with such succinct power, that community often appears when death so easily could have. Crip community, fleeting as it may be (who knows how Sean folds back into everyday life in normative terrain after the protest is over), provided a way to keep on living… a crip futurity…

I am caught, again, in the trouble of ending and ending in futurity. Stories end, perhaps, into futurity. Recalling King (2003), he tells us that once a story is, “loose in the world, it can never be recalled” (p. 10). As King (2003) also says of telling his story,

It’s yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to your friends, turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don’t say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now. p. 29.

The act of telling stories, as productive as this act is, releases them into the world, gives them over to the social, and there, they live on… into the future. Telling disability stories propels disability and disabled lives into the future. ‘

I do not end with lessons how to build crip community, or even sure-fire ways to enact it. I end, instead, in a knowing which is, of course, generated through a feeling. It is my feeling that one way of moving along into a non-so-progressive future, desiring the disruption disability makes, and seeking out different stories of difference as we do, is to continue to enliven a collective curiosity for what enactments of crip community are and what they could become. As I end this work, reflecting on the many stories of communities (and their failures), it seems to me that an essential part of the work of enacting crip community is storying these enactments. Telling stories of these enactments
requires us to attend to the everyday ways that we are compelled to be together through desiring disability for its multiplicitous ways of living. Storying these encounters as enactments of community requires us to think carefully about how feelings generated in the midst of being together sometimes produce crip community. Narrating an encounter as an enactment of crip community rather than an inconsequential moment in time reflects a dedication to not letting crip community pass us by or slip away unnoticed. Telling stories of crip community, propelling them into the social, is a collective act and meaning-making work. So, too, is listening to these stories. Telling, listening, and retelling stories of crip community may, for a moment, enact the kind of world that the words are gesturing towards.

Communifying around these communal stories in all of these ways produces and sustains crip community. And in the mist of a world that desires disability in so many deadly, and also enlivening ways, producing crip community through stories is a way to keep on living… into the future…
References


CAPB San Diego. (2013, September 28). Where is hope: Police brutality against people
with disabilities. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-
us45tMA7kI on October 1, 2013.


Appendix A—Recruitment Letter

My name is Eliza and I am a PhD Candidate in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT) under the supervision of Dr. Tanya Titchkosky, Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, OISE/UT. As part of my dissertation on disability community, I am researching how the involvement of students in disability-related groups affects their university experience at the University of Toronto (U of T), St. George Campus between (date). For this portion of my research I am conducting semi-structured interviews with one student participant from each of the following groups: U of T St. George’s Chapter of Best Buddies; U of T Accessibility Services’ Peer-Mentorship Program; U of T’s Mad Student Society; Doing Disability Differently research group in the Sociology and Equity Studies in Education department at OISE/UT. I am a student member of the Doing Disability Differently research group.

Since you are a member of one of the disability-related groups I am interested in, I am inviting you to participate in this study. There will only be one interview, interviews will be approximately one hour long and it can occur in a place of your choosing.

These interviews will be completely confidential; no personally identifiable information will appear in interview transcripts or in my written analysis. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time without consequence. All that is required of you in order to withdraw is to notify me of your desire, by phone, email or in person. If you do chose to withdraw, I will immediately and securely destroy the audiotape holding the recording of your interview, the computer file holding its transcript and I will remove any analysis that I have included in my dissertation.

If you are willing to participate or would like to know more about this study, please let me know by email at eliza.chandler@utoronto.ca or my phone at 647-668-7585 by (date).

Thank you for your time,

Eliza Chandler
PhD Candidate, Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
OISE/UT
Appendix B—Letter of Informed Consent

My name is Eliza Chandler and I am a PhD Candidate in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT) under the supervision of Dr. Tanya Titchkosky, Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, OISE/UT. As part of my dissertation on disability community, I am researching how the involvement of students in disability-related groups affects their university experience at the University of Toronto. The purpose of this research is to explore how students experience disability community at U of T, especially how communities can make students with disabilities feel included or excluded in university life.

To conduct this research I will carry out semi-structured interviews with one member of each of the following disability-related groups: U of T St. George’s Chapter of Best Buddies; U of T Accessibility Services’ Peer-Mentorship Program; U of T’s Mad Student Society; Doing Disability Differently research group in the Sociology and Equity Studies in Education department at OISE/UT. I am a student member of the Doing Disability Differently research group.

My research data will be comprised of these interviews and my experience of them as well as publicly available material about these organizations. I invite you to participate in this research because you are a member of a U of T disability-related group. There will only be one interview, which will be approximately one hour long, and the interview can occur at a place of your choosing. You can withdraw from this study at any time without consequence.

These interviews will be completely confidential and no personal information which can be used to identify you will be included in my research, apart from the disability-related group you belong to. Your confidentiality will be ensured. With your permission, I will audio-record these interviews and personally transcribe them, omitting any identity-related information that may have come up during our conversation. I will stop taping any time you request and you may withdraw from the interview at any time. If you wish to withdraw from this research project, I will destroy the taped material. For the duration of my research process, a tape of your interview will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office at New College, U of T. Once the final version of my dissertation has been approved, I will securely destroy the audiotapes and computer files holding the interview transcripts three years after my research has been conducted.

If you have any further questions about this research project, please contact me by email at eliza.chandler@utoronto.ca or my phone at 657-668-7585. You could also contact my supervisor, Dr. Tanya Titchkosky by email at tanya.tichkosky@utoronto.ca or by phone at 416-978-0451. The Research Ethics Board has approved this project. Information on the University of Toronto policy and procedure for research involving human subjects can be obtained from the Office of Research Ethics by email at ethics.review@utoronto.ca, or by telephone at 416-946-3273.
I look forward to discussing the study with you further and answering any questions you may have. You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Eliza Chandler
PhD Candidate, Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
OISE/UT

Consent Statement:

The study has been explained to me and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I can withdraw from the research project at any time. I agree to take part in this project, and I consent to having the interview audio recorded.

__________________________________________  ______________________
Signature                                      Date
Appendix C—Interview Guide

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about your community and your involvement in it.
   a. How long have you been involved in this community?
2. What are the activities of your community?
3. Who are the members of your community?
4. Who can belong to your community as a member and who could belong as an ally?
   a. How does disability effect one’s membership or participation in your community?
   b. Would you open to a broader membership? How do you think other members of your community would feel about broadening the membership?
   c. How do you think your group feel about broadening the criteria for who can belong as a member?
5. What are the common understandings, investments and goals of your community?
6. Have you ever been surprised by where you have or where you have not found the emergence of a sense of community?
7. What does disability community feel like to you?
Appendix D—Ethics Approval (2013)

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 27120

December 3, 2013

Dr. Tanya Titchkosky  
DEPT OF HUMAN, SOC SC & SOC JUSTICE  
EDUCATION  
OISE/UT

Ms. Eliza Chandler  
DEPT OF HUMAN, SOC SC & SOC JUSTICE  
EDUCATION  
OISE/UT

Dear Dr. Titchkosky and Ms. Eliza Chandler,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "A geography of disability: From containment to community"

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: December 2, 2011
Expiry Date: December 1, 2014
Continuing Review Level: 1
Renewal: 2 of 4

We are writing to advise you that you have been granted annual renewal of ethics approval to the above-referenced research protocol through the Research Ethics Board (REB) delegated process. Please note that all protocols involving ongoing data collection or interaction with human participants are subject to re-evaluation after 5 years. Ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your protocol. Note that annual renewals for protocols cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry as per our guidelines.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible. If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Wakefield, Ph.D.
REB Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS
McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3273  Fax: +1 416 946-5763  ethics.review@utoronto.ca  http://www.research.utoronto.ca/for-researchers-administrators/ethics/
Appendix E—Ethics Approval (2012)

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 27120

December 14, 2012

Dr. Tanya Titchkosky
DEPT OF SOCIOLOGY & EQUITY STUD. IN EDUC.
OISE/UT

Ms. Eliza Chandler
DEPT OF SOCIOLOGY & EQUITY STUD. IN EDUC.
OISE/UT

Dear Dr. Titchkosky and Ms. Eliza Chandler,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "A geography of disability: From containment to community"

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: December 2, 2011
Continuing Review Level: 1
Renewal: 1 of 4

We are writing to advise you that you have been granted annual renewal of ethics approval to the above-referenced research protocol through the Research Ethics Board (REB) delegated process. Please note that all protocols involving ongoing data collection or interaction with human participants are subject to re-evaluation after 5 years. Ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your protocol. Note that annual renewals for protocols cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry as per our guidelines.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible. If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Wakefield, Ph.D.
REB Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS
McMurtrie Building, 12 Queen’s Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3273  Fax: +1 416 946-5761  ethics.review@utoronto.ca  http://www.research.utoronto.ca/for-researchers-administrators/ethics/
Appendix F—Ethics Approval (2011)

Dear Dr. Titchkosky and Ms. Eliza Chandler,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, “A geography of disability: From containment to community”

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: December 2, 2011
Expiry Date: December 1, 2012
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB’s delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Schneider, Ph.D.,
C.Psych
REB Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager

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