Crip Caring: Disability Intimacy in Art, Media, and Culture

by

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Abstract

Contemporary Disabled artists are making work that considers facets of their identities and expressions of intimacy through a critical disability lens, expanding ideas about care, and illuminating how disability identities may intersect with and expand these human experiences. This thesis considers four contemporary Disabled artists, collectives, and curators creating work about disability, and interrogates their practices and making of work. This study of disability cultural production is explored as an autoethnographic, epistolary thesis, reviewing an experiential understanding of disability intimacy alongside critical disability theory.

Declaration

No generative artificial intellegence (AI) was used in the research, formatting, production, or writing of this work.

Acknowledgements

Over the past year, in the conceptualization of and research for this thesis, I have personalized my work like never before. I have always been somewhat fearful of writing about myself, so instead, I have de-personalized my writing, my research, and, to an extent, my education. This project has changed how I approach research, care, and the subjects and people I want to write about. To my loved ones, please consider this thesis my 'thank you' for your compassion, understanding, support, and love throughout this process and beyond—I cannot imagine a better support system than you.

I want to acknowledge with graditude and respect that OCAD University is located on the traditional territories and treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. These are the ancestral territories of many nations, including the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendat who are the original owners and custodians of the land. Tkaronto (Toronto) is also home to many urban First Nations, Inuit and Métis. I am a guest on these shared traditional and stolen lands, and I want to acknowledge the original and inherited stewards of this place.

I must recognize that this research would not be possible without the amazing Disability Justice advocates, researchers, community leaders, and individuals who worked before and alongside me. I want to acknowledge and credit the Black, brown, trans, Mad, and queer, Disabled leaders: you made this possible, and I am forever grateful for your work and your grace. Thank you beyond measure to the artists, curators, and collectives who have been my inspiration for this thesis: Galen Marquess, Frida Kahlo, Sins Invalid, Rodney Bell, seeley quest, Sarah Faux, Emma Jones, and Carolyn Lazard.

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Andie Borbely, my go-to-girl, I can't begin to tell you how much your friendship means to me. Thank you for introducing me to Heartstopper, for watching Yellowjackets even though you hate horror, for the trips to the thrift store, for the pop-in visits, for our Friday work-periods, and for your unconditional support. You're amazing, and I love you.

My twin-pillars, Carole and Eldon, you are my life's blood. Mum & Dad, thank you for making sure I eat, rest, and get home safe. Thank you for the push and determination. I love you forever, and I can never express how much it means to me that you're always on Team Siobhan.

Thanks to my lovely chickens and tiny cat. Thank you for your happy clucks and puffy, feathery hugs. Silky, thank you for the reminder that life is fleeting and nothing lasts forever. Misty, thank you for your tiny paws, enormous appetite, and your shocking aptitude for learning new tricks; you never stop making me laugh and smile.

Finally, Gabriel, my ultimate inspiration, and my favourite person. I could not have finished this thesis without your love and support. Thank you for everything you do for me; rides to Mimico station, surprise boba, ego-boosts, gentle reminders to go to sleep, and every other caring, intimate act. I love you dearly, thank you for everything.

I wait here for you forever as long as it takes.[1]

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[1] Stefan Marx, *I Wait Here for You Forever as Long as It Takes*, 2007.

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Preface

In early 2025, as a graduate student at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada, I wrote a piece of ficto-criticism in an introductory course on the operations of critique, taught by Professor Jim Drobnick. Here, I formatted my writing in the epistolary style (in the form of letters) as a kind of tribute to my favourite novel, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.* I am a horror-fiction devotee, regularly re-watching *Yellowjackets*[2] and devouring Stephen King novels.

i especially enjoy the story of *carrie*, told through imagined documents, memoirs, letters, reports, and articles on the fictitious events of the 'black prom' and the life and death of carietta white.

While deciding how I wanted to present my thesis research, I considered the ways that disability shapes my own intimate relationships, maybe none more so than with my partner Gabriel. As my main interlocutor on my symptoms, my medications, my grief, and my joy, Gabriel shares in my disability experience. My therapist suggested I write letters to Gabriel as part of my reflexive journaling exercises, expressing my thoughts and feelings through the intimate and critical power of letter-writing, and this thesis is a continuation of that ongoing practice.

a practice i adore and hope to continue for many years.

In an effort to present my research with its deserved care, humour, and honesty, this thesis is primarily formatted as a series of letters to my partner, Gabriel.

hi gabriel!

Academic work often demands structure, conformity, and expects a certain level of distance from the research—I have none. This thesis presents my lived experiences, sense of humour, obsessions, and cravings. I talk about vomit, failure, saying the wrong thing, and being scared; I

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[2] *Yellowjackets*, Television Series (Crave Canada: Showtime, 2021).

geek about horror fiction, good food, and amazing Disability scholars. I welcome you to the intimacies of love-letter writing and Crip Caring.

as you may have noticed, i include little comments here: diatribes, intrusions, jokes, mini letters, and other less ‘academic’ writing here. these comments differ stylistically from the rest of this document; right-justified, bolded, a different font, and entirely written in lowercase. this practice is deeply inspired by my friend and mentor olivia mae sinclair, and her thesis, ‘soft, sloppy, stories.’[3] i cannot tell you what an honour it is to learn from you. thank you olivia.

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[3] Olivia Mae Sinclair, “Soft, Sloppy, Stories.” (Masters Thesis, 2021), https://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/3355.

Introduction

Dear Gabriel,

Throughout this research, I will be using the term crip.

it’s literally the first word in the title of this thesis

I use this word as an identity term with a great understanding of its roots in hate. ‘Crip’ is a reclaimed and pride-based identity term for Disabled community members. It is a word designed to challenge ableism and embrace Disability as a culture, a future, and an existence living in our bodies. ‘Crip’, like other formerly derogatory terms, is being reclaimed by oppressed and marginalized groups as a mechanism of empowerment. Because of the power of context, I hope that you can recognize the derogatory past of this language and appreciate its transformation into a source of pride and love.[4]

Within this text, I sometimes capitalize ‘Disability,’ and ‘Disabled,’ and sometimes I do not. This is an intentional practice that comes from the distinction between Disability as an identity and disability as a diagnosis (the medicalized language of the body). When I capitalize ‘Disability’ it is done with the acknowledgement of a culture, a connection of communities with a shared sense of pride in Disability. An individual with a Disabled identity embraces being disabled as a positive, core aspect of their identity; we feel gratitude, collectivity, and reject the ways ableism may permeate our societies and minds. Often, Disabled people use identity-first language (Disabled person vs. person with disability) because this reflects how our lives are shaped by our disabilities. I want to be very clear: I do not believe in the superiority of any of these identity

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[4] Additionally, as I identify as queer, I will also be using that term with an acknowledgement of its painful past, and knowing it’s not a word that continues to be painful for some LGBTQ+ communities. This queer crip is sending you love now and forever. Thank you for your work and I’m sorry for what has been used against you.

models. It is not necessary for everyone diagnosed with a disability to feel gratitude and pride in their disability.

sometimes i resent my disabilities. i fume at miscommunications and the ways in which my brain reacts to being late, to small changes in the schedule, to sensory overload. i resent my symptoms and pain, the ways which they shaped my relationships, my history, my present. i resent the doctor's appointments and tests and medication and side effects.

It can be difficult to always embrace my disabilities,

especially when my worst symptoms flare up during important events … like writing my mfa thesis

but I still feel pride in my identity. I am proud to be Disabled, and I recognize and appreciate all the ways that Disability has shaped me into the person I am.

My stake in the research and work of Disability is from the approach of a writer, curator, and artist who identifies as a queer, physically and neurodevelopmentally disabled crip spoonie.[5] My interests in intimacy and Disability are tethered to my relationships of care—with my partner,

talking to you gabriel

my parents, friends, educators, and with myself. Author and educator Therese Estacion writes, "To be asked to be seen and held are some of the most vulnerable things that we can do as

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[5] Cleveland Clinic, "What Is the Spoon Theory Metaphor for Chronic Illness?," Cleveland Clinic, November 16, 2021, https://health.clevelandclinic.org/spoon-theory-chronic-illness. Developed in 2003 by writer Christine Miserandino, 'Spoon Theory' is an analogy for the energy expended from living with chronic pain symptoms. If each day, people with chronic pain start with a set number of proverbial spoons, each one representing the physical and mental energy expended on daily tasks or activities. Smaller tasks, like showering or getting dressed, may cost only one spoon, while larger tasks, like cooking or vacuuming, may take three or four spoons. On days with increased pain, even smaller tasks may require multiple spoons. You can borrow from future days, but this will lead to a 'spoon deficit,' where you have no energy to complete any tasks.

disabled folks. So much of what is out there tells us that we are undeserving of care, of regard, of space,"[6] and she's right: Intimacy is a foundational experience of humanity and community, and our interactions with care and intimacy as Disabled people may be directly shaped and broadened by our foundations and positions in the context of disability.

My first real acknowledgement of my own disabilities started early in the COVID-19 pandemic. I have always used a Ventolin to manage my chronic asthma, and I have always known the relationship between my own mortality and monitoring my symptoms carefully, taking them seriously, and struggling through the feeling of not being able to breathe. When I was a kid, my uncle passed away from an asthma attack,

i wish i got to meet you as an adult, i miss you uncle troy

and I remember how that cemented the fear and possible consequences of not taking my body's reactions and symptoms seriously. I was diagnosed with anxiety (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and autism-spectrum disorder (ASD) in high school, and received an individual education plan (IEP) to support my needs in the classroom. I renewed my IEP in college and used those supports throughout my academic career, finally feeling as though I had some sense of control over my education and anxiety—and then the pandemic began in early 2020. Like many parents trying to get their adult children out of the crushing isolation of their bedrooms, my mum encouraged daily walks down the road. Living in the country, we had the privilege of enjoying the unpaved shoulder of the road by ourselves. During our walk, my mum noticed my repeated spitting in the ditch,

gross

and was upset when I told her I was spitting out vomit.

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[6] Therese Estacion, ed., "The Disability Issue," *Feels Zine*, no. 23 (2025).

super gross

When I was about nine, I started vomiting regularly. The doctors ran tests, I visited Sick Kids hospital in Toronto, Ontario, and had a panic attack in their changing room before my barium swallow, distraught by all the new experiences and my overwhelming anxiety. Despite the doctors' visits, medications, tests, and specialists, no one really knew why I was throwing up after every meal. In 2020, on our walk down the road, I confessed to my mum that because no one had been able to provide a diagnosis or explanation, I just stopped talking about my symptoms, assuming that because they did not know what it was, there was nothing anyone could do to help (it was due to this shutdown in communication that my mum was not aware my symptoms persisted). Alongside the regular vomiting and nausea, I live with chronic pain, an experience I didn't have words for until my 20s. Today, I have a provisional diagnosis of rumination syndrome, a functional gastrointestinal disorder (FGID), and a notoriously difficult disorder to diagnose.[7]

Gabriel, do you remember when I realized most people's hiccups don't hurt? It was around that time that I really began to acknowledge and talk about my disabilities and chronic pain more openly, and when I first started actively engaging with the named principles of Disability Justice.[8] I sought after art made by Disabled people, media with realistic disability representations, and music by artists with chronic illnesses.

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[7] Alexander Kusnik and Sarosh Vaqar, "Rumination Disorder," PubMed (Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing, 2022), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK576404/. Patients take years to be accurately diagnosed and tend to see numerous physicians leading to sparse inaccurate data. Furthermore, patients commonly report vomiting, abdominal pain, and symptoms compatible with avoidant/restrictive food intake disorders, making the diagnosis of rumination syndrome particularly difficult.

[8] Sins Invalid, "10 Principles of Disability Justice ," Sinsinvalid.org, 2015, https://sinsinvalid.org/10-principles-of-disability-justice/.

shout-out to tarquin alexandra's "symptoms song"[9]

This search for Disabled community and representation in the arts has culminated in my primary research interests—disability culture, communication, arts, and media. As "one of the most organic and human experiences on the planet,"[10] disability exists everywhere and looks different in everyone. I regularly express the common "either you live long enough to become disabled, or you die young."

this tends to freak out the not-yet-disabled people who hear me (additionally, they do not generally appreciate being referred to as 'not-yet-disabled', but i also tend to enjoy the vague 'threat' of joining us.

Disability is the work of every human being. Deconstructing ableism ultimately benefits everyone. As American writer, educator, and activist Mia Mingus offers, "We are all aging, we are all living in polluted and toxic conditions and the level of violence currently in the world should be enough for all of us to care more about disability and ableism."[11] Through mass-disabling events, powerful government administrations trying to undo decades of activists' progress, and concurrent genocides, disability spans every sector, every culture, and every human life.

By virtue of its extensive interconnection, disability is a broad topic. In my focus on this thesis, I had to narrow the scope to which I consider disability. Limitations to this research include the small sample size of artists, curators, and collectives I present in this thesis, the lack of featured

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[9] My favourite synopsis of her music: "Tarquin's writing distills the dichotomous nature of invisible illness; the desire for wellness alongside the recognition for who her illness has made her." Tarquin Alexandra, "Tarquin Alexandra About," Spotify, 2026, https://open.spotify.com/artist/1LeODPik4GN34iHau23CCx?autoplay_ok=1.

[10] Mia Mingus, "Access Intimacy, Interdependence and Disability Justice," *Leaving Evidence* (blog), April 12, 2017, https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/04/12/access-intimacy-interdependence-and-disability-justice/.

[11] Ibid.

disabled artistic representation outside North-America and Europe, the timeline attached to this project, the absence of first-person interviews with the subjects, and my autoethnographic inclusions, which frame the research within my own lens of Disability and personal experience as a privileged, queer, Canadian, white, cis-gendered woman. Additionally, this thesis does not cover the physical, attitudinal, and systemic barriers to disabled people working and exhibiting in arts and gallery spaces: inaccessible venues, a lack of sensory-friendly options, and financial barriers. Originating from capitalist systems in North America and Europe which prioritize productivity, inequitable class structures and a frequent absence of financial opportunities are entwined with disability, resulting in common employment gaps, lower wages, less job stability, reduced access to benefits, and systemic barriers across workplaces.[12] These restrictions also contribute to the lack of representation of disabled artists in post-secondary educational institutions.[13]

In my life, disability relates to how I work, study, and communicate; also what I do for work, what I study in school, how I communicate with friends, strangers, and loved ones. In this thesis I focus on how Disabled artists are making work about disability and intimacy, and I am completing this research and writing within my MFA program. This thesis is a requirement for my degree in Criticism and Curatorial Practice (CCP), but it could have looked wholly different than the document you are now reading. When I entered the CCP program, my academic interests were scattered across half a dozen disciplines (feminist theory, digital surveillance, children's place within conventional art spaces, and semiotics in galleries to name a few).

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[12] Government of Canada, "Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities," www.canada.ca, July 11, 2024, https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability-inclusion-action-plan/employment-strategy.html.

[13] University of Toronto, "4. Ableism and the Canadian Academy: Interrogating the Culture and Systems of Exclusion | National Dialogues," Utoronto.ca, 2022, https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/nationaldialogues/2022-ableism-and-canadian-academy.

in the first few weeks of classes, i introduced myself half-a-dozen times to my peers, “hi, i’m siobhan sprickerhoff, i’m so excited to be here. i completed my undergrad in craft & design at sheridan, majoring in industrial design and minoring in textiles. i completed a post-grad certificate in public relations and communications. i love reading, especially horror and plotless fiction. my academic interests include … and disability justice.” i always included that bit at the end, it was a soft-announcement of my own disabilities and the role they play in my academic career.

Throughout the early semesters of my graduate work, I began writing more about my personal disability experiences, especially as my symptom flare-ups began to interfere more-regularly in my coursework and schedule. When my peers began considering their thesis topics, presenting intimate research about family history, diaspora, and feminist ecologies, I started to consider how I could write and talk about disability for my thesis. This work is designed to be completed in this program. As a creative practice, this epistolary thesis is my submission of ‘Fine Art’ for my MFA. While I am writing about Disability, culture, community, art, and artists as a ‘criticism’ thesis, I am also indulging in an act of personal creative writing.

Disability culture has evolved over the past several decades, and so too has the representation in art and media landscapes. Artists work in the business of cultural production, documenting experience, history, contemporary events, and society. Thanks to this growth in media and cultural representation, disabled intimacy has also increased in visibility. The late, great, writer, and disability rights activist Alice Wong, edited an anthology titled *Disability Intimacy*, featuring 40 first-person essays and poems on “the joys and challenges of the modern disability experience, and intimacy in all its myriad forms."[14] Wong's work is foundational to this review of the creative cultural production of Disabled artists, collectives, and curators, and the consideration of how Disabled identities may intersect and expand experiences of intimacy.

Artists, collectives, and curators Sins Invalid, Sarah Faux, Emma Jones, and Carolyn Lazard are articulating their experiences of care and intimacy through a lens of disability, and answering questions like: What does my community look like? Will someone recognize that I am worthy of sex and love? Can I build my relationships from bed?

i wonder about these all the time, and i wonder if my not-yet-disabled friends think about this. do you feel the enormity of not thinking about those questions?

These creative cultural producers continue the long tradition of Disability culture and disability aesthetics in modern art. Tobin Siebers, a professor of literature, art and design at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, became a key figure in the field of Disability Studies through his analysis of 'Disability Aesthetics.' In 2010, Siebers published *Disability Aesthetics*, which "Explores the rich but hidden role that disability plays in modern art and in aesthetic judgments."[15] Siebers writes:

> Most people have a difficult time conceptualizing the idea that disabled people are in a position to make significant contributions to art, either as symbols of aesthetic beauty or by making art themselves. Nevertheless, the history of modern art unveils increasingly as it evolves a powerful connection to disability. Aesthetics opens us to more expansive and diverse conceptions of the human, and disability has become a powerful tool for rethinking human appearance, intelligence, behavior, and creativity.[16]

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[14] Alice Wong, *Disability Intimacy* (Vintage, 2024), https://typebooks.ca/products/9780593469736?srsltid=AfmBOoq-y1hODBoorSkX2POgM9oONOM5NVNww1uEq-5jZZP_7zyXH2Ud.

[15] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, *Press.umich.edu* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), https://press.umich.edu/Books/D/Disability-Aesthetics2.

[16] Ibid.

Disabled artists are articulating their experiences of care and intimacy through their expressive cultural production; working on the front lines of public perception. Awareness is not enough. We need action, accommodation, and active acknowledgement of our exclusion through systemic and cultural ableism. Disability justice demands direct effort, and contemporary Disabled artists are creating work that continues the traditions of disability aesthetics—an insistence on being seen, heard, and valued.

Traversing understanding and intimacy, creative work about disability bridges the gaps where language can fail. This practice of intimate disability communication thrives through emerging and established artists alike. After their BFA thesis exhibition at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York—focused on depictions of chronic pain in the body—contemporary, Disabled artist, Galen Marquess commented, "It's this incommunicable thing … [I] had this really beautiful week of feeling understood and feeling like I can connect with people about my leg, and then tomorrow we deinstall the whole show … so I'm emotionally preparing to again be misunderstood for a while."[17] Marquess' conclusion that once their exhibition finished, they would lose that outlet for connection and intimacy—a tangible representation of their symptoms that others actually understand—is not an uncommon one, due to social stigmas and regular invalidation—from healthcare practitioners and family members.[18]

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[17] Galen Marquess, "It Should Reset on Its Own without a Problem (If You Leave It Alone It Will Only Get Worse)," Instagram Reel, *Galen Marquess*, April 8, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/reel/DIM6f4FSFhj/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

[18] Gilles Merminod et al., "Talking about Chronic Pain in Family Settings: A Glimpse of Older Persons' Everyday Realities," *BMC Geriatrics* 22, no. 1 (April 23, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-022-03058-8; Camille Cottais, "When Chronic Pain Meets Chronic Loneliness | Faculty of Health Sciences," Faculty of Health Sciences (University of Ottawa, 2024), https://www.uottawa.ca/faculty-health-sciences/news-all/when-chronic-pain-meets-chronic-loneliness; Brandon L. Boring et al., "Experiencing Pain Invalidation Is Associated with Under-Reporting of Pain: A Social Psychological Perspective on Acute Pain Communication," *The Journal of Pain* 25, no. 5 (November 19, 2023): 104428, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpain.2023.11.011.

people in pain don't get used to living in pain; we just get used to not talking about it.

Disabled artists have the unique opportunity to share their intimate disability experiences—beyond language—and employ their "set of innovative, virtuosic skills,"[19] as individuals with disabilities.

i am so tired of the government fighting over our bodies, i am so tired of queer craft events without accessibility, i am so tired of casual ableist language, i am so tired of explaining dynamic disabilities at family parties, i am so tired of three hour classes that start at 6:30 in the evening, i am so tired of the offhand comments of disordered eating and the perpetual societal goal of thinness, i am so tired of being tired and in pain and nauseous.

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[19] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018). 126

1. We’ve Always Been Here, and We’re Never Going Away

> **It turned out that like every time I’ve come together with people I’ve shared an identity with, there was bliss and also heartbreak when we assumed that the bliss would be easy and last forever.[20] -Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha**

Dear Gabriel,

Have you seen the stats? Global rates of disability are increasing, and somehow, despite disability being an inevitability for everyone, disabled people are not often adequately represented outside of clinical or medical settings.

and especially not our intimate lives and experiences

People with disabilities lead large, engaging, intimate lives, and these relationships and broadened crip intimacies deserve recognition, care, and the opportunity for representation in the arts, media and culture. Making up an estimated 16 percent of the global population, disabled people in media are few and far between, representing disabilities through only 3.1 percent of onscreen characters.[21] Subjects visibly depicted in media and the arts reflect societal values, and this noticeable lack in authentic representations of disability—by disabled people and for disabled people—mirrors the lack of societal interest (and overt neglect) in disability culture and intimacy.

Disability is the largest historically underrepresented identity group, and it is also the most diverse, spanning age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, region, class, and more. Because disability exists in so many fundamentally distinct ways, different conceptual

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[20] Ibid, 58.

[21] Sheena Brevig, “The Case for Authentic Disability Representation in Media,” Center for Scholars & Storytellers, October 2019, https://www.scholarsandstorytellers.com/blog/diversity-in-hollywood-the-case-for-authentic-disability-representation-in-film-and-tv.

frameworks or 'models' of disability exist, which differently define how society perceives, understands, and acknowledges people with disabilities. Independent people with disabilities and individuals within the multitude of Disability communities may all favour different conceptions of disability.[22] There are many disparate models of disability; common examples include the medical and social models. The medical model "describes a widespread approach to disability common since the 1800s that views disabilities of all sorts as abnormalities that need to be cured or eradicated,"[23] and suggests that disabilities are a deficit of an individual, which should be fixed. The medical model is often regarded as outdated, viewing disabilities as inherently negative; however, some people with disabilities feel that the medical model best reflects their beliefs about disability (or some aspects of their disability). The social model is a much newer framework, which argues that society disables people by failing to accommodate their access needs. Coined in 1983 by British sociologist, author, and Disability advocate, Mike Oliver, the social model of disability distinguishes between 'impairment' (physical or mental traits of the individual) and 'disability' (access barriers imposed by society).[24] The introduction of the social model shifted the focus on disability from a need to 'fix' disabilities according to the medical model, to demanding acknowledgement and change to the disabling environmental, attitudinal, and organizational barriers. While the social model has introduced major development in societal attitudes toward disabilities and represents many individuals within Disability communities, there are some disabilities and conditions that the social model of disability will not properly

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[22] Rosalyn Benjamin Darling, "Toward a Model of Changing Disability Identities: A Proposed Typology and Research Agenda," *Disability & Society* 18, no. 7 (December 2003): 881–95, https://doi.org/10.1080/0968759032000127308; Jennifer Sullivan Sulewski, Heike Boeltzig, and Rooshey Hasnain, "Art and Disability: Intersecting Identities among Young Artists with Disabilities," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (January 25, 2012), https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v32i1.3034.
[23] Zosia Zaks, "Changing the Medical Model of Disability to the Normalization Model of Disability: Clarifying the Past to Create a New Future Direction," *Disability & Society* 39, no. 12 (2023): 1–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2255926.
[24] Mike Oliver, "The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On," *Disability & Society* 28, no. 7 (October 2013): 1024–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.818773.

address. Some conditions are disabling because of the lack of societal accommodation (if everything were accessible, they would not be disabled), but some disabilities cannot be socially accommodated. No amount of accommodation can make up for the fact that you're in pain, or nauseous, or other symptoms you may feel; those conditions can be better represented by the medical model of disability (disability as something to be treated and cured). I would love for some of my symptoms to be solved or cured; however, others feel integral to my experience and outlook.

i would not be myself without my autistic experience, difficulties and all.

As we are living through simultaneous mass-disabling events,[25] the number of people with disabilities is rising, and disability representation needs to grow with it. We need an active place in media, online, in public community, in the law, and in the arts.

by the way, we need representation fucking everywhere!

There is a lack of positive cultural Disability representation; a lack of disabled characters in media; a lack of disabled artists in galleries and museums (and even less representation of disabled artists with multiple marginalized identities); a lack of acknowledgement of how Disabled activists are foundational to every contemporary social and political movement,[26] from

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[25] Mount Sinai, "Long COVID Experts and Advocates Say the Government Is Ignoring 'the Greatest Mass-Disabling Event in Human History' | Mount Sinai - New York," Mount Sinai Health System, September 19, 2022, https://www.mountsinai.org/about/newsroom/2022/long-covid-experts-and-advocates-say-the-government-is-ignoring-the-greatest-mass-disabling-event-in-human-history; Global Disability Fund, "Situational Analysis - Persons with Disabilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," *Global Disability Fund* (United Nations, August 2025), https://globaldisabilityfund.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/sitan-palestine-full-report.pdf.

[26] Syrus Marcus Ware, "Magic from the Madness: On Black Disabled Activists and Artists Making Change in 2016," CBC, December 28, 2016, https://www.cbc.ca/arts/magic-from-the-madness-on-black-disabled-activists-and-artists-making-change-in-2016-1.3911410; Lucy Webster, "From the Wheelchair-Using Black Panther to the 'Cripple Suffragette' – 10 Heroes of the Disabled Rights Movement," *The Guardian*, December 9, 2022, sec. Society, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/dec/09/from-the-wheelchair-using-black-panther-to-the-cripple-suffragette-10-heroes-of-the-disabled-rights-movement.

racial and social justice, LGBTQ+ and gender rights, environmental and climate justice, and more.

Creative work bridges a gap of communication where sometimes, language fails. As artists, curators, and collectives, Sins Invalid, Sarah Faux, Emma Jones, and Carolyn Lazard, work in the public expression of disability intimacy, challenging the social dynamics of visibility, and fostering sites of resistance.[27] French historian, author, and philosopher Michel Foucault studied the limits of freedom and forms of control imposed over ‘unreasonable’ and ‘deviant’ individuals, including “the mad,” “the delinquent,” “the homosexual,” and “the impaired.” Segregated from society and institutionalized, these groups were subjected to medicalized strategies in attempts to ‘normalize’ their behaviours.[28] Foucault asserts that disabled people are inherently marked, because “impairment cannot be a value-neutral fact of the body or merely a biological description because it is always already saturated in medical, legal, social, and cultural constructions of disability.”[29] Disabled bodies have been made visible, governed through ableist social and political conditions, and share identity as a “highly marked, heterogeneous group whose only commonality is being considered abnormal.”[30] Subjugated into the trap of visibility,[31] it is purposefully difficult to avoid the self-restricting force of conformity. In their creation of disability-focused artistic works—each distinct—Sins Invalid, Faux, Jones, and Lazard establish

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[27] Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 534, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/cambridge-foucault-lexicon/visible/9119FAC3C1FCB9CC2B4299D734157D03.

[28] Shelley Tremaine, “On the Subject of Impairment,” in *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory* (University of Lancashire: Bloomsbury Academic, 2002).

[29] Ibid, 32; Kelly Fritsch, “Desiring Disability Differently: Neoliberalism, Heterotopic Imagination and Intra-Corporeal Reconfigurations,” *Foucault Studies*, no. 19 (June 17, 2015): 43–66, https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i19.4824.

[30] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[31] Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon,* 534.

"'sites of resistance': spaces that hold out the promise for a reconfiguring of power relations in a way that might redress oppressive institutions and practices,"[32] an important feature of Foucault's theory of power. These contemporary artists are following the historical precedent of Frida Kahlo, and other 'early' disabled artists; creating and sharing intimate creative works about disability, and proudly exhibiting unrestrained visibility of the 'impaired.'

Considered one of the most significant artists of the twentieth century and among the most recognized disabled artists,[33] Frida Kahlo blended revolutionary ideals and personal philosophy on feminism, gender, race, and social class in Mexico, with her intimate feelings about disabled identity. Widely known for her work in the surrealist movement, Kahlo remains a figure at the forefront of the artistic expression of disability and the self. Kahlo was raised in Coyoacán, a lush, historic neighbourhood in the centre of Mexico City. She contracted polio at 6, and the illness resulted in the underdevelopment of one of her legs. After surviving a severe and traumatic bus crash at 18, Kahlo began painting while confined to her bed, suffering from chronic pain for the rest of her life. Kahlo used self-portraiture "as a tool to process and explore questions of identity and existence,"[34] famously asserting, "I paint myself because I am often alone and I am the subject I know best."[35] As the subject, Kahlo depicts her disability and bodily devastation in *The Broken Column*, (fig.1) from 1944. Art historian and educator Whitney Chadwick writes in *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement,* "Kahlo exposes the shattered spine and surgical brace that dominated her self-awareness after her accident,"[36] inviting her

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[32] Christopher Pollard, "Explainer: The Ideas of Foucault," The Conversation, August 26, 2019, https://theconversation.com/explainer-the-ideas-of-foucault-99758.
[33] Tate, "Frida Kahlo," Tate, June 9, 2005, https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/frida-kahlo.
[34] Frida Kahlo Foundation, "Frida Kahlo Biography with All Details | Frida-Kahlo-Foundation.org," www.frida-kahlo-foundation.org, 2026, https://frida-kahlo-foundation.org/biography.html.
[35] Frida Kahlo; Laura Almeida and Denver Art Museum, "Quotes from Frida Kahlo | Denver Art Museum," www.denverartmuseum.org, December 28, 2020, https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/blog/quotes-frida-kahlo.
[36] Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985; repr., Thames & Hudson, 2021), 97.

audience into the intimacies of her disability. Depicted nearly naked, a red chasm through the middle of her torso, Kahlo presents her spine: a cracked, decorative Ionic column. Fitted with a surgical brace and dotted with nails, Kahlo's eyes stare back at the viewer, soft waves of hair framing her teary face. *The Broken Column* expresses Kahlo's disability, intimacy, her self-image and identity, while refusing to dissociate the materiality of the impaired body from the practices that bring it into being.[37] Contemporary disabled artists are continuing Kahlo's tradition of inviting her audience into her intimate body; the sensations of pain, and self, and beauty. *The Broken Column* is a striking example of how disabled artists can, and have been, communicating about the intimacies of disability and the self through their creative and cultural production.

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[37] Shelley Tremaine, "On the Subject of Impairment," 32; Kelly Fritsch, "Desiring Disability Differently."

2. Care(ing) Work and Access Intimacy

> **And I hold a deep place of respect for the ways so many of us have been denied access to love.[38] -Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha**

Dear Gabriel,

Did you know people often live with disabilities for years before identifying as disabled?[39] In our society that frames disability as dependency—and dependency as reduced social capital—identifying as disabled can feel like making yourself expendable, disposable, or vulnerable. The hesitation to identify as disabled is often not a personal one; it's structural. Disabled identity directly counters ableist structures of 'care' and 'intimacy', and extends empathetic, joyful community intimacy. Disability as identity offers an opportunity to deconstruct notions of ability, independence, and care. Disability as community encourages and advocates for the freedom to dream beyond the hyper-individualistic society we live in, and promotes interdependence, a system where we recognize that no one is independent from one another.

We are mutually reliant; we need each other; we need each other's support; we need to lean on each other as a community, and rally around the most marginalized people. Since its inception in 2005, the Disability justice-based performance project collective Sins Invalid champions Disabled community and has cherished "disabled Black, Indigenous, and people of the global majority, and queer, trans, and nonbinary disabled people."[40] Disability justice differs from disability rights, Patricia (Patty) Berne, the late American writer, performance artist, organizer,

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[38] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work,* 76.

[39] Andrew Pulrang, "The Pros and Cons of Identifying as Disabled," Forbes, January 19, 2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2023/01/19/the-pros-and-cons-of-identifying-as-disabled/.

[40] Sins Invalid, "About Sins | Sins Invalid," Sinsinvalid.org, 2024, https://sinsinvalid.org/about-sins/.

and co-founder of Sins Invalid, remarked in an interview with Alice Wong and the Disability Visibility Project that “Rights can be ‘granted’ and taken away … [but] Justice is about how we live and love and practice everyday interactions. It’s not something that can be taken away.”[41] Patty Berne helped develop the framework of disability justice in the early 2000s alongside other activists—including Mia Mingus and Stacey Park Milbern—who each “felt excluded by the mainstream disability rights movement as queer people and women of color. They felt frustrated by single-issue advocacy and decided to create something different.”[42] Sins Invalid embodies the principles of disability justice developed by these activists, and promotes a community space for creative crips to share, love, cry, and connect; access intimacy built into the collective’s foundation. Writer and educator Mia Mingus coined the term “access intimacy” on her blog Leaving Evidence in 2011, a description of that intangible feeling when someone really “gets your access needs”[43] and you feel safer, closer, and more at ease. This is a fundamental part of the Sins Invalid project, introducing members to genuine collective care: “Someone accessing care that’s very intimate, without shame,”[44] this is the basis for access intimacy.

In 2008, performers Rodney Bell & seeley quest[45] took to the Sins Invalid stage at the Brava Theater in San Francisco, California, and challenged able bodied supremacy by valuing disability, queerness, and community. Bell is a performing artist from Te Kuuititanga, Auckland,

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[41] Patricia Berne, DVP Interview: Patty Berne and Alice Wong, interview by Alice Wong, *Disability Visibility Project*, November 19, 2015, https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2015/12/14/dvp-interview-patty-berne-and-alice-wong/.

[42] Sara Luterman, “In Life and in Art, Patty Berne Made Space for Disabled People to Thrive,” The 19th, August 12, 2025, https://19thnews.org/2025/08/patty-berne-obituary-disability-justice-movement/.

[43] Mia Mingus, “Access Intimacy: The Missing Link,” *Leaving Evidence* (blog), May 5, 2011, https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/.

[44] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work,* 46

[45] In the tradition of author and theorist bell hooks and poet e.e. cummings, seeley quest chooses not to capitalize their name.

New Zealand, touring the world and working with renowned dance companies and artists.[46] Bell acquired his disability in a motorcycle accident as a young adult—paraplegia, with no feeling and control from below his chest—and "discovered a new depth of intimacy, communion, and peace with the tangata taua/tangata whai kaha (disabled community) and dance that cloaks him and is always acting upon and reimagining a better world for us all to flourish equally."[47] seeley (sie) quest is a trans, disabled, writer, performer, environmentalist, and organizer,[48] "working in literary and body-based composition, curation and facilitation."[49] quest was an active member of Sins Invalid from 2007 until 2015. Together, Bell and quest presented the opening performance of Sins Invalid in 2008.

In this performance, (fig. 2) Bell and quest disrupt ableist and heteronormative narratives of desire and disability. Bell navigates his wheelchair with a distinct combination of frantic energy and grace. He throws a basketball, dribbling, spinning, catching the frenzied ball, muscles flexing while pushing his chair. quest walks onto the stage—butch in their flannel cut-off and buzzcut—engaging Bell with their playful introduction, a casual "wanna play?"[50] quest pursues Bell, they flirt, they play, chuckling to themselves, laughing together. Throwing the ball away, Bell says they want to 'play' something fun; first poking, then holding Bell's hand. Sitting together, stroking each others' bodies with erotic leisure, the performers revel in the intimacy they share. Then quest slaps Bell across the face and lights dim suddenly, backing away, pushing

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[46] Rodney Bell and New Zealand Dance Company, "Rodney Bell - New Zealand Dance Company," New Zealand Dance Company, 2022, https://nzdc.org.nz/company/people/rodney-bell.
[47] Rodney Bell and New Zealand Dance Company, "Rodney Bell."
[48] Sync Leadership and Seeley Quest, "Seeley Quest," Sync Leadership, 2017, https://syncleadership.com/programmes/sync-intensive/sync-canada-quebec/seeley-quest/.
[49] seeley quest and Tangled Arts, "seeley quest - Bio," Tangledarts.org, 2019, https://tangledarts.org/about-us/artist/seeley-quest/.
[50] Sins Invalid, Rodney Bell, and seeley quest, "Opening: 2008 Sins Invalid Performance," YouTube (Sins Invalid, 2009), https://youtu.be/SKuExYzDJ1E?si=LGSHRn_CrtejKffj.

quest away, Bell expresses his betrayal, gasps with hurt, they fight, and Bell is shoved back, falling to the ground. As Bell rights himself, quest pushes him back, against a bench-like structure on stage, breathing heavily. Patty Berne's voiceover begins, framing the performance:

> Was this desire safe? Is this safe? Are you safe, sufficiently insulated from us, the deviant, the disabled, the non-normative, the crippled -- or might you become stained by our leaking needs?
> Is that why you settle most comfortably in your mental lazy-boy when we labor to shield you from our difference? We, the disabled,
> the unconscious yet visceral threat to the able-bodied myth of emotional predictability and bodily control? Is that why you contain us in institutions, police our bodies and movements, abuse us, exterminate us, eliminate us even before birth -- do we frighten you? Must we frighten you…
> We concave our chests to hold your projections, cupped repositories for your fear of difference, your denial of your need for help, your terror of being vulnerable.
> A wise woman once said "Fear is behaving as though Truth were not the truth". And living requires risk, as does the hottest of desires.
> We live in risk.
> Tonight -- we are coming home.[51]

quest touches Bell's chest, Bell pushes their hand away, and stretches their arms up and out, extended across a rising beam. The lights dim more, a red glow begins to shape Bell's body as it's lifted—Bell suspends his lower body and chair by stretching his arms across the rising beam, a distinctly Christ-like image—higher, off the ground, hung in the air. Bell's body—chair and all—hangs, framed by a glowing red cross.

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[51] Sins Invalid, Rodney Bell, and seeley quest, "Opening: 2008 Sins Invalid Performance."

Sins Invalid, the performance group and artists' incubator was founded in 2005 by Patty Berne and Leroy Moore.[52] Based in the Bay Area, Sins Invalid "works to develop and present cutting-edge work where normative paradigms of 'normal' and 'sexy' are challenged, offering instead a vision of beauty and sexuality inclusive of all individuals and communities."[53] Sins Invalid celebrates historically marginalized artists, those who have been excluded because of their disabled, raced, or queered bodies.[54] The 2008 opening performance by Rodney Bell and seeley quest illustrates their mission. Their intimate and evocative performance is fraught with tension and chemistry, playing with Bell's wheelchair, shifting bodies, playful movement, and aching.[55] While Bell and quest are performing on stage, they are joined by two interpreters, sitting in the upper stage left, the interpreters use American Sign Language (ASL) to translate Berne's voiceover speech. Because access is built into the Sins Invalid's mission, ASL interpretation and wheelchair accessibility are always present at meetings and performances. Additionally, they ensure access to gender-neutral restrooms, seating which accommodates audience members with larger bodies, language options, audio descriptions, low-stimulation quiet spaces, and scent-free venues. Tickets are available on a sliding scale, pay-what-you-can basis and "no one is ever turned away for a lack of funds."[56] This overarching framework of accessibility gives people the freedom to enjoy the performances, to engage in the communities, and the possibility of feeling the relief of access intimacy.

Shayda Kafai, writer and educator at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, writes about Sins Invalid's access framework in her 2021 book *Crip Kinship*, "These intentional and

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[52] Sara Luterman, "In Life and in Art, Patty Berne Made Space for Disabled People to Thrive," The 19th, August 12, 2025, https://19thnews.org/2025/08/patty-berne-obituary-disability-justice-movement/.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Sins Invalid, Rodney Bell, and seeley quest, "Opening: 2008 Sins Invalid Performance."

[56] Shayda Kafai, *Crip Kinship* (arsenal pulp press, 2021).

expansive examples of what cripped, queered, anti-capitalist access can look like illustrate the crip-centric liberated zones that Disability Justice as a practice and process facilitates." Disability justice is the work of caring, when it is really happening, it is often "too messy and wild to really fit into traditional movement and nonprofit industrial complex structures,"[57] it is vital, and rare. The kind of foundational access and community care that Sins Invalid has fostered, "comes from years of relationship building and building trust, from fucking up, making repair, learning from mistakes, and showing up for each other."[58] Access intimacy is not specifically reserved for disabled people, but it is most impactful when someone who rarely feels true access, finally finds that deep, accommodating intimacy and care. Access is foundational to intimacy, but also to progress and disability justice. In her 2017 lecture at San Francisco State University, Mia Mingus noted the necessary work of access and disability justice in intersectional liberation:

> Access intimacy is critical to disability justice because there will never be any work with disabled people that does not include accessibility work. And it is important to note that access is often one of the biggest hurdles to doing work with disabled communities. Access is not some "optional way of life" for us—it is part of everything we do … So, if we are working to transform the world for all of us, and not just some of us, access will be a huge part of this work. There is no liberation without disabled people.[59]

The access intimacy of Sins Invalid fosters this community of marginalized people, and purposefully builds a space of crip care. Shayda Kafai recollects her experience of care, "When I saw Sins Invalid perform … I felt the recognition of community … an ecstatic breakage, a bodymind opening and welcoming."[60] Similarly, performing artist and disability advocate, Maria

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[57] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 124.
[58] Ibid,127.
[59] Mia Mingus, "Access Intimacy, Interdependence and Disability Justice."
[60] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 46.

Palacios—lovingly known as 'Goddess on Wheels'—described her involvement in Sins Invalid as transformative,

> It was so revolutionary for me, to come into the space that I had never occupied before. It blew me away — disabled performers that get paid to do our art? Ableism is so brutal that even to this day, disabled people and disabled artists, disabled performers, we have to come in with a machete to eliminate ableism before we can even get to the door. Coming in to [Sins Invalid] was like being reborn.[61]

This feeling of ecstatic transformation and access intimacy is why the work and practice of Sins Invalid is so refreshing and important. Intimacy framed by Disability communities looks like collective care, access needs being joyfully met, and as poet, writer, educator, and activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha insists, it is a "commitment to not leaving each other behind, the power of a march where you move as slowly as the slowest member and put us in front … the power of movements that know how to bring each other food and medicine and organize from tired without apology."[62]

Living in Disabled bodies and minds, lusting for recognition,[63] genuine access intimacy becomes a powerful experience, one of the primary ways in which we build systems of trust and interdependence. Piepzna-Samarasinha recounts the difficulty they've experienced and witnessed seeking care, "I think about the many people I know and love who have a really hard time receiving care because 'care' has always been conditional, or violent,"[64] and how they have mostly "received shitty care, abusive care, care with strings attached."[65] This abuse of 'care'

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[61] Sara Luterman, "In Life and in Art."
[62] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 126.
[63] Ibid, 117.
[64] Ibid, 132.
[65] Ibid, 55-56.

systems is why access intimacy feels so novel, it can live anywhere, surprising you with the way it reorients access and value.

i don’t think i’ve ever gotten a tattoo and not told my artist about my chronic pain. aside from being with you, gabriel, and andie and rach too, tattoo appointments are where i most commonly feel this elusive kind of intimacy

3. Worthy: Sex and Relationships

> **And disabled people are not supposed to exist either, and we're definitely not supposed to be perceived as being attractive or desirable or writing about those things.[66] -Seán Kinsella**

Dear Gabriel,

For a long time I was nervous to identify as Disabled, even though the constant pain, nausea, and anxiety disabled me daily. I was nervous to share in the weight of that word, to declare myself honestly, in fear of rejection and being unlovable.

i hate that i used to worry about that—the ways ableism permeated my brain and body and heart and beliefs.

Now I proudly identify as Disabled, and through that identity, community, and education, I have learned how often it has been (and still is) marked by "oppression, suppression and violence."[67] In social and political activist work from the disability rights movements in the 1960s onwards, disabled people fought for their rightful place within social and public life, "campaigning for civil rights, anti-discrimination legislation, equal access to education, community integration and environmental accessibility,"[68] which provided the opportunity to celebrate disability with pride. In her first book, *The Intimate Lives of Disabled People,* disability scholar and professor, Kirsty Liddiard, highlights how this early "(necessary) structural focus upon disabling environments has left disabled peoples' sexual politics marginalized."[69] This paucity of knowledge around the

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[66] Seán Kinsella, "Representation, Reflection, Resistance," ed. Therese Estacion, *Feels Zine*, no. 23 (2025): 74.

[67] Kirsty Liddiard, *The Intimate Lives of Disabled People* (2018; reprinted, Abingdon, Oxfordshire ; New York: Routledge, An Imprint Of The Taylor & Francis Group, 2019).

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

sexual lives of disabled people has resulted in a cultural positioning of assumed asexuality.[70] This broad cultural belief that disabled people lack the capabilities and capacities to desire or enact sexuality, sensuality, and intimate expression invalidates individual experiences of sexuality, and further infantilizes disabled people. When disabled people do have sex, they are marked as deviants for falling outside of predetermined sexual structures and conventions. Liddiard states that, “disabled desires are cast as inappropriate and unruly because they can take different forms to established norms,”[71] where they may contradict the mentally and corporally-standardized, ableist, heteronormative, fundamentals of sex: “heterosexual, private, ideally reproductive, and above all autonomous.”[72] Disabled desire is made dangerous, by breaking from conventions of the “corporeal wholeness and predictability … in a well-ordered society.”[73] The incomparable Alice Wong wrote about this ‘othering’ of disabled sex, love, and intimacy in the introduction to her 2024 anthology, *Disability Intimacy*, recounting her experience googling ‘disability intimacy’ and finding “disappointing and pathetic”[74] search results: “Under the People Also Ask section, questions such as “Can people with disabilities find love?” … Articles on stereotypes, stigmas, sexuality, asexuality, sexual abuse, and sexual dysfunction abounded.”[75] Wong rebukes these results, seeking creative expressions of disability intimacy: more than the preconceptions of sex, dating, or romance, but the “ever-expanding universe composed of a myriad of heavenly bodies … relationships within a person’s self, with others, with communities, with nature, and beyond.”[76] Contemporary artist Sarah Faux explores these intersections of disability, pleasure,

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[70] Ibid. Differing from the asexual identity category “claimed by those who, for a variety of reasons, do ‘not experience sexual attraction.’ Instead, the asexuality Liddiard refers to is “a set of processes purposefully imposed upon disabled bodies and minds.”
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Alice Wong, *Disability Intimacy: Essays on Love, Care, and Desire* (Vintage, 2024). xviii
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

colour, and sexuality in her painting practice, creating work bursting with desire, touch, chronic illness, and disability intimacy.

Sarah Faux revels in desire, and confronts society's preconceived ideas about disability and sex through her abstract painting practice. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Sarah Faux lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She holds an MFA in Painting from Yale University and a joint BA/BFA from Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design.[77] Faux describes how her childhood illnesses and Ehlers-Danlos diagnosis impact her painting practice, "I have an escapist, dissociative streak that can actually be quite pleasurable. I was a sick kid and had a lot of high fevers, hallucinations, and out-of-body experiences where I felt like I was floating above myself. So I have always felt like a group of fragmented parts, and I both engage with reality and disassociate from it over and over in my paintings."[78] Allowing for the potential joy of dissociating, Faux maintains there is pleasure to be found in embarrassment, in pain, remarking on the "intensity of feeling that maybe doesn't happen in other parts of your life."[79] Seeking somewhere to find freedom and "a rejection of shame in artwork … sexuality in a way that's 'not proper' or not what's expected."[80] By toying with the expected through abstraction, she introduces distinct imagery into her portraits. Navigating the friction of disability, play, sex, pleasure, pain, and materiality, Faux's 2023 painting *Little trouble girl* (fig. 3) blurs the public and private nature of sexual intimacy. Part of her *Sweetbitter* exhibition, *Little trouble girl*—titled after the iconic 1995 Sonic Youth song—embodies play, pleasure, pain, and the

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[77] Sarah Faux, "Bio," Sarah Faux, n.d., https://sarahfaux.net/bio/.
[78] Sarah Faux, Sarah Faux by Victoria Roth: Bodily Abstraction, interview by Victoria Roth, *BOMB Magazine*, April 21, 2025, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2025/04/21/sarah-faux-by-victoria-roth/.
[79] Sarah Faux, Sarah Faux: Autofriction, interview by Gaby Collins-Fernandez, *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 15, 2025, https://youtu.be/PROd4Hs71TQ?si=wNNG56rNSonW4i0f.
[80] Ibid.

sexual euphemism. Exploring the “delights and contradiction of living in a body,”[81] Faux plays with colour, scale, and the intimate intrusions of objects and flesh. *Little trouble girl* is a diptych—the two canvases pushed next to each other like bodies in lust—featuring two (mostly nude) figures—one fluorescent pink and orange, the other a rich yellowish-green—bent over, the foregrounded figure holding a hammer against their body, the backgrounded figure slyly watching, one eye peeking over their shoulder. Colours seem to glow from the canvases, while smeared, incoherent shapes assemble limbs, arms, hands, backs, and apple-round ass cheeks. Faux often uses household objects as sexual symbols, hammers, scissors, and zippers feature throughout her exhibitions, conveying the imagery of kink, sexuality and euphemism. The intentionality of the direct, and raunchy symbols she uses—while maintaining visual abstraction—provide care, protection, and a blurring of the public and private. Faux presents characters she wants to evoke autonomy, “like they have their own sexuality … Like they have their own way of moving through the world,”[82] and accomplishes this through the less-literal depictions of embodying sexuality and flesh.

Faux’s practice of building, breaking, and playing with sexual imagery and euphemism reflects part of the nature of disability intimacy; that awesome, terrible, exciting feeling she explains as, “I’m so in love, but I have a horrible stomachache,”[83]

i don’t know if i’ve ever related so much to a quote

and how we (as disabled lovers, humans, bodies, and minds) can learn to let pleasure and pain coexist. As we seek the lust of recognition, how do we acknowledge the limitations of a body?

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[81] Gaby Collins-Fernandez, “Sarah Faux: Autofriction | the Brooklyn Rail,” Brooklynrail.org (The Brooklyn Rail, 2025), https://brooklynrail.org/event/2025/04/15/sarah-faux-autofriction/.

[82] Sarah Faux, Sarah Faux: Autofriction.

[83] Ibid.

Sarah Faux's work exudes the painterly language of impairment;[84] she celebrates the friction of disability and sexuality, noting in an interview for BOMB magazine, "I think of living in a body as being just sloppy to its core. We're always pissing, and shitting, and sweating, and trying to hide our nudity or our shame at being discovered to be flesh. That instability is deeply embedded in these paintings."[85] This intentionality in sloppiness mirrors the honesty in disability intimacy: when your body needs accommodation, contradicting the "fundamental norms of conventional sexual mores"[86] sexual support demands intimate candor. Sarah Faux paints sincere imagery of sexiness and disability, illustrating the messiness of living in—and as—a body.

i was warned when we started dating that i should not discuss (or joke about) 'the vomiting thing' so openly because it was unappealing and might scare you away. i am still glad i didn't take that advice, recognizing that if we were to build a serious relationship, i needed someone who could laugh alongside me through the off-putting and honest nature of my disability experiences.

When disability and sexual intimacy intersect, exploration is essential. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha writes about crip sex in her book 2018 book, *Care Work,* saying "Wow you're really fucking hot and I'm gonna figure out how to make you feel pleasure in your body and I'm gonna respect your body and you're gonna do the same thing, awesome."[87] Part of this exciting exploration is dating; meeting new people, exploring your bodies, and the intensity of change. This can be lovely, finding people you grow to love, sharing in the delight of mutual care, new inside jokes and intensity. This process can also be deeply traumatic. Gabrielle Drolet,

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Sarah Faux, Sarah Faux by Victoria Roth: Bodily Abstraction.

[86] Kirsty Liddiard, *The Intimate Lives of Disabled People*, 3.

[87] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 120.

journalist, cartoonist, and author of the hilarious, painful and intimate memoir, *Look Ma, No Hands,* said "sex was the thing that made me feel most disabled,"[88] and in a survey of disabled men and women's accounts of past and present intimate relationships, feminist disability studies scholar Kirsty Liddiard wrote the participants "felt that a relationship, love and sex were 'out of reach' as a disabled person—a form of sexual oppression internalized through ableist constructions of disabled people as lacking sexual agency and opportunity,"[89] sentiments reflected by societal assumptions and fueled by stereotypes. Reports of men on dating apps seeking 'slightly autistic women,' a 'touch of the 'tism,' and girls with 'tism rizz' have popped up across social media platforms.[90] Notably, these men never acknowledge autistic women as fully fleshed out, living, breathing, human beings with neurodevelopmental disabilities, they fetishize the palatable and socially acceptable characteristics associated with autistic women, and deny what they deem as less socially acceptable behaviours. Reduced to the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope,[91] in the imaginings of straight men on social media, autistic women are dehumanized and directed to embody their (gendered) desirability, because it's seemingly an improvement to the "dominant cultural representations of disability and the impaired body as both degendered and monstrous."[92] Due to the extent to which disabled people devalue "their (sexual) selves, revealing the ways in which low sexual self-esteem and self-worth, feelings of inadequacy (in relation to heteronormative discourse), and low body confidence can be common parts of the

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[88] Gabrielle Drolet, *Look Ma, No Hands* (Random House, 2025). 134.

[89] Kirsty Liddiard, "The Work of Disabled Identities in Intimate Relationships," *Disability & Society* 29, no. 1 (May 8, 2013): 121, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.776486.

[90] Angel Martinez, "Why Are Men Fetishising Autistic Women on Dating Apps?," Dazed, October 20, 2025, https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/68872/1/men-fetishising-autistic-women-on-dating-apps-bumble-hinge-love-relationships.

[91] Aubrie Johnson, "Autistic Women and the Scourge of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl," *Aubrie in the Open — Medium* (blog), October 13, 2022, https://zora.medium.com/autistic-women-and-the-scourge-of-the-manic-pixie-dream-girl-e376badb74e9.

[92] Kirsty Liddiard, "The Work of Disabled Identities in Intimate Relationships," 120.

disabled (sexual) psyche in ableist heteronormative sexual cultures,"[93] resulting in a troubling dating scene for disabled people. In her memoir, Drolet*,* recounts her own disabled dating experience; being told on a date, "If I were you, I literally would have killed myself."[94] For disabled women, dating has been consistently unsafe, often presenting dehumanizing and dangerous experiences.[95] In her painting practice, Sarah Faux embeds her work with the amalgamation of disability dating reality: fear, excitement, pleasure, pain, joy, and uncertainty.

The friction of sex and disability—the intensity of pain and pleasure—Faux describes as "having conflicting feelings and holding them at the same time" is fundamental to the way she experiences her disabilities and being human[96] and it is evident through her work. Implicating viewers in her paintings, Faux conveys experiences of disabled intimacy instability, in loving, lusting, and manipulation.[97] Inspired by the work of Joan Semmel, and Luchita Hurtado, Faux maneuvers first and second-person perspective, and spatial construction throughout her works, further abstracting the depicted figures. She often fragments bodies, offering friction through abstraction and figuration—painting limbs separate from torsos, household objects, hands and genitalia devoid of attachments—avoidant of the whole, and fashioning bodies which refuse to cooperate or be contained. Bodies twisted, writhing from delight rather than pain,[98] Faux presents the ways that disability may shape the boundaries of sexuality, and simultaneously pushes the boundaries of her medium (intuitively using oil paints, dye, bleach, spray paint, and collage) to

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[93] Ibid, 115-128.
[94] Gabrielle Drolet, *Look Ma, No Hands*, 6.
[95] Sophie Butler, "Facts about Disabled Women That Probably Weren't in Your IWD Campaign," Instagram (@sophjbutler, March 9, 2026), https://www.instagram.com/p/DVrP6mrDHTp/?igsh=NTE5M2R6ajFidnV1.
[96] Sarah Faux, Sarah Faux: Autofriction, interview by Gaby Collins-Fernandez, *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 15, 2025, https://youtu.be/PROd4Hs71TQ?si=wNNG56rNSonW4i0f.
[97] Sarah Faux, Sarah Faux: Autofriction; Sarah Faux, "Sarah Faux : Report from Yale," Two Coats of Paint , January 27, 2014, https://twocoatsofpaint.com/2014/01/sarah-faux-report-from-yale.html.
[98] Alice Wong and Archer Magazine, "Disability, Pleasure and Ageing: The Pleasure Principle - Archer Magazine," Archer Magazine, September 2, 2024, https://archermagazine.com.au/2024/09/disability-pleasure-ageing/.

create a rich variety in texture and surface effect.[99] This artistic practice demonstrates the visceral nature of Disabled sexuality; joyful connection, disorganization, and pleasure, while facing the perpetual sexual discrimination which disabled people face.

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[99] Sarah Faux, "Sarah Faux - CV | Artsy," Artsy, 2016, https://www.artsy.net/artist/sarah-faux/cv.

4. Digital Crips (Media and Online Community)

I bitterly feel the want of a friend.[100] -Mary Shelley

Dear Gabriel,

In high school, I tried hard to find friends and create a community that would last, but my adolescence did not feature a group of cool, supportive girlfriends. There were no late-night dance parties, and study sessions. The tween and teen girl sleepovers I attended did not look like a scene from *Gilmore Girls,*[101] they did not feature girlhood bonding or deep chats about life, and love, and pain, and the future. I know this cinematically ideal friend group is not realistic:

except it's at least somewhat realistic, because now i do have those deep chats at sleepovers. i am surrounded by cool, supportive girlfriends. we try to meet weekly for study/work sessions, and we laugh about grief and doctor's appointments and partners and parents and life and death and pain and the future

I know high school is not like the movies, and friendships do not always last a lifetime, but that does not mean I didn't grieve the imagined, enduring, tender friendships that I pictured as a little girl. Especially while managing chronic pain I didn't have a name for, while spitting out (or even grosser, swallowing) regurgitated food on the playground after lunch, while living with symptoms I didn't know how to communicate, I tried to talk to my friends about it, but it wasn't something they could understand.

i don't blame any of my girlhood friends for not knowing how to support me, this was never a responsibility they could've burdened, and i love them for caring enough to try. z & k, you two

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[100] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818; repr., London: Penguin Random House, 2018), 11.

[101] *Gilmore Girls*, Television Series (Netflix: The CW, 2000).

made pain manageable, you made vomit funny, thank you for holding my tiny crip hand and loving me because i was being myself honestly.

Finding early friendship and community can be messy, painful, joyous experiences, and for just about everyone, it is so deeply necessary to growing up, emotional development, social skills and figuring out your place in the world.[102] While growing up and beginning to embrace my Disability identity, the first place I found genuine crip connection was on Tumblr. Founded in 2007, Tumblr is a microblogging and social media platform widely credited for introducing a generation to social justice and socially progressive media content.[103]

tumblr was my first virtual classroom, and in it i learned about feminism, anti-racism, queerness, transphobia, ableism, mental health, and social justice movements alongside cute pictures of cats and gifs of my favourite characters

As a self-proclaimed Whovian, Phannie, Demigod, Marshmallow, and Tribute,[104] among many other, deeply cringe-worthy fan titles, I reveled in the unabashed fandom spaces on Tumblr. Users on the platform commonly self-described in tags, allowing others to find further commonality within fandoms or subcultural spaces on the platform. Sharing our frustrations and successes, good days and bad, Tumblr became the first place I 'talked' about my disabilities openly (outside of medical and familial conversations). I found other users who shared in my social bluntness, who also raved about David Tenant's hair, who were just as excited as I was for Rick Riordan's newest book releases. Tumblr was the first digital space where I felt crip love, and now, well over a decade later, I still do.

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[102] Gary C. Glick and Amanda J. Rose, "Prospective Associations between Friendship Adjustment and Social Strategies: Friendship as a Context for Building Social Skills.," *Developmental Psychology* 47, no. 4 (2011): 1117–32, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023277.

[103] Emma Sarappo, "How Tumblr Taught Social Justice to a Generation of Teenagers," Pacific Standard, December 13, 2018, https://psmag.com/social-justice/how-tumblr-taught-social-justice-to-a-generation-of-teenagers/.

[104] These are fandom-generated nicknames for fans of *Doctor Who*, Dan & Phil, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, *Veronica Mars*, and *The Hunger Games* series. I'm honestly still a huge fan of all of these works.

Digital spaces play an incredibly important role in the communication and care of disabled communities. Online community spaces often allow for greater access options for disabled people, bridging the access gap and providing a strong sense of connection as group members share disability-related resources, memes, and friendship.[105] Particularly for individuals with chronic illnesses and related symptoms (including pain, fatigue, allergies, and low-energy), "online communities play a crucial role in connecting disabled people with each other."[106] Serving the mutual purpose of being a safe space to socialize with community-members with similar experiences, and providing a platform to share resources, these online disability communities exist in a myriad of forms across the internet.

all my personal favourites are now mostly hosted on discord servers.

Contemporary feminist artist, social scientist, and storyteller, Emma Jones, started her ongoing documentary storytelling project, *The Nightstand Collective* (fig. 4) in 2015. Her work explores "chronic illness, memory, and care through ritual, image, and intimate material culture.[107] Beginning as a study of the lived experience of autoimmunity through still life object study, Jones seeks to "document the choreography of care in domestic spaces,"[108] and present the objects that become extensions of our bodies online. *The Nightstand Collective* is a digital disability art space with a racial inclusion practice: accepting all submissions. This documentary art project is a virtual, visual "exploration of chronic illness through the intimate space of the bedroom nightstand"[109] and the visual and textual inventory of the contents. In her 2021 book

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[105] Rosemary Richings, "Why Online Community Is Essential for Disabled Individuals like Me," The Good Trade, February 27, 2026, https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/digital-community-and-disability/.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Emma Jones, "The Geography of Illness," The Geography of Illness, 2014, https://www.thegeographyofillness.com/about.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

Crip Kinship, scholar Shayda Kafai explores "Finding Crip Kinship Online," she writes, "Crip-centric liberated zones that occupy cyberspace create something that we, isolated and lonely in our rooms, on our beds, … need: crip kinship … a network of reciprocity, a relationality that brings us closer to one another."[110] Online spaces for the community of disabled artists are vitally important to sharing experiences and stories, building relationships and avoiding complete social isolation.[111] Emma Jones' *The Nightstand Collective* acts as a space for disabled communities to interact and work in "cross-disability solidarity."[112] *The Nightstand Collective* currently lives online at thegeographyofillness.com, Emma Jones' website. The project emerged from her own experiences with chronic illness and disability, including endometriosis, asthma, autoimmune thyroiditis, depression, anxiety, and a symptomatic Tarlov cyst.[113] As a participatory photography project, *The Nightstand Collective* displays dozens of submissions from disabled community members; photos of their nightstands. Jones' explains how this project began, "My experience of being chronically ill was a slow shrinking of my physical and social world, and subsequently a big expansion in my interior life. My nightstand was a reflection of all the things that I was trying to use to navigate my new reality."[114] She invites community members to submit a picture of their nightstand, and a list of the contents, and related stories about the objects depicted. Uploaded to the website, these images become intimate portraits of chronic illness and disability, designed to reach out and remind you of the web of online communities, and digital crips; remind you that you are not alone.

Digital communication is easier now than ever before.

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[110] Shayda Kafai, *Crip Kinship*, 118.
[111] Rosemary Richings, "Why Online Community Is Essential for Disabled Individuals like Me."
[112] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 50.
[113] Jordan Davidson, "Your Nightstand Might Look like This If You Have a Chronic Illness," The Mighty, May 2, 2024, https://themighty.com/topic/chronic-illness/emma-jones-nightstand-collective-chronic-illness/.
[114] Ibid.

theoretically …

With a steadily increasing online population[115] more people are communicating online, however, disabled people are navigating “a digital environment that is increasingly hostile.”[116] From the sweeping anti-disability legislation,[117] web inaccessibility,[118] to the resurgence of eugenic logics,[119] and intensifying surveillance,[120] existing in digital spaces forces disabled individuals and communities to “navigate the tensions between hypervisibility, surveillance, and self-representation;”[121] a difficult engagement. Despite the challenge, disabled communities continue to carve out collective spaces online, creating infrastructures of access and relational care outside state and institutional frameworks,”[122] because, as Leah Lakshmi Piepenza-Samarasinha notes, “foundations have rarely ever given disabled people money to run our own shit.”[123] A major problem with the current digital proliferation is the lack of access. Online accessibility experts WebAIM found that in 2025, Only 3% of the internet is accessible to disabled people,[124] citing a number of widespread critical issues: low-contrast text, missing alt text, a lack of headings, and empty links. Disabled people already face practical challenges; “the

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[115] Chao Li et al., “Does the Internet Bring People Closer Together or Further Apart? The Impact of Internet Usage on Interpersonal Communications,” *Behavioral Sciences* 12, no. 11 (October 31, 2022): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12110425.

[116] Shawna Sheperd-Murtagh , “Disabled Content Creators’ Collective Care: Navigating Grief and Insidious Trauma,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (March 2, 2026), https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.6360.

[117] Amy Allbright, “Trump’s Executive Order Rolls Back Decades of Disability Rights,” Americanbar.org, August 12, 2025, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/disabilityrights/news/trumps-executive-order/.

[118] WebAIM, “WebAIM: The WebAIM Million - an Annual Accessibility Analysis of the Top 1,000,000 Home Pages,” webaim.org, 2024, https://webaim.org/projects/million/; Julia Métraux, “X-Cluded: Elon’s No-Headlines Update Sucks for Accessibility,” Mother Jones, October 5, 2023, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2023/10/x-axed-headlines-that-sucks-for-accessibility/.

[119] Rebecca Sear, “Demography and the Rise, Apparent Fall, and Resurgence of Eugenics,” *Population Studies* 75, no. sup1 (December 13, 2021): 201–20, https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2021.2009013.

[120] Johana Bhuiyan, “Social Media and Online Video Firms Are Conducting ‘Vast Surveillance’ on Users, FTC Finds,” The Guardian (The Guardian, September 19, 2024), https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/sep/19/social-media-companies-surveillance-ftc.

[121] Shawna Sheperd-Murtagh , “Disabled Content Creators’ Collective Care.”

[122] Ibid; Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 258.

[123] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 124.

[124] WebAIM, “WebAIM: The WebAIM Million.”

need for accessible transport and buildings, financial support and appropriate social care,"[125] as well as the significant obstacle from a lack of understanding and awareness.[126] Digital spaces can be—and have been—an accessible platform for disabled communities; "X [Twitter] used to be a central discussion platform for the disability community. Yet, in its Elon Musk era, it's an inaccessible platform for far too many disabled people. Everything from alt text to third-party applications that enable compatibility with screen readers is no longer widely available."[127] Mirroring common experiences of in-person inaccessibility, collective experiences are only enjoyable if the same social experiences and environments are as accessible to you as your neighbours, peers, and colleagues.[128]

The widespread inaccessibility—both in-person and digital—of Disabled communication, connection, and community contributes directly to the high rates of loneliness among disabled people; "Over two thirds (70%) of disabled people say their mental health is affected by social isolation, raising concerns of a significant increase in mental health conditions."[129] This isolation from community directly affects the quality of life, and social integration of people with disabilities.[130] Author and illustrator Gabrielle Drolet wrote about how her isolation during pandemic lockdowns, and the physical pain from her disability negatively impacted her mental wellbeing, "There's a real, recorded link between chronic pain patients and mental illnesses like depression. It turns out there's a mental toll that comes with your body hurting for nearly every

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[125] Sense, "Loneliness Rises Dramatically among Disabled People."

[126] Ibid.

[127] Rosemary Richings, "Why Online Community Is Essential for Disabled Individuals like Me,"; Amanda Morris, "Disabled People Fear Twitter Changes under Elon Musk Leave Them Behind," *Washington Post*, November 18, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2022/11/18/disability-support-twitter-harassment/.

[128] Rosemary Richings, "Why Online Community Is Essential for Disabled Individuals like Me."

[129] Sense, "Loneliness Rises Dramatically among Disabled People."

[130] Beni Gómez-Zúñiga, Modesta Pousada, and Manuel Armayones, "Loneliness and Disability: A Systematic Review of Loneliness Conceptualization and Intervention Strategies," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13, no. 1040651 (January 25, 2023), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1040651.

waking hour of the day."[131] Explained by a variety of factors, including accessibility, activity status (employment or hobby), living environment, and support networks,[132] loneliness as disabled people may be experienced "to a greater extent than people without disabilities."[133]

i have wished my symptoms upon others—if only to give people a point of reference for the experience of pain and loneliness and exhaustion and missing out—and i feel shame whenever i think about this.

While pandemic lockdowns disconnected everyone, this forced-isolation disproportionately affected disabled people.[134] Cut off from local communities, support workers, family members, and friends during early pandemic lockdowns, the access and use of digital technology to connect with people was vital to the mental health and wellbeing of disabled individuals,[135] and these digital crip spaces are still enduring sources of care and education among disability communities.

In a digital age where so many online spaces are filled with vitriol and hate,[136] the internet also fosters community care, support, and public education. Writer, public speaker, and disability rights activist Imani Barbarin (@crutches_and_spice) is one of many wonderful digital Disability content creators and public scholars. Active on Instagram, Twitter (X), and TikTok, Barbarin uses her online platforms to "start awareness campaigns around issues like covid-19 safety

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[131] Gabrielle Drolet, *Look Ma, No Hands*, 14

[132] Beni Gómez-Zúñiga, Modesta Pousada, and Manuel Armayones, "Loneliness and Disability."

[133] Ibid.

[134] Sense, "Loneliness Rises Dramatically among Disabled People."

[135] Ibid.

[136] For Disabled people, Black and brown people, Indigenous people, women, immigrants, queer and trans people; basically anyone who isn't a straight, cis, white man.

precautions,"[137] and Disability education. Born with cerebral palsy[138] Barbarin is no stranger to facing access barriers, and notes the critical importance of digital Disability spaces: "Being able to be seen online was a lifeline, it was literally a lifeline for a lot of us."[139] Across her social media accounts, Barbarin explores her identity as a Black, Disabled woman, and grounds disability theory with practical and humorous experience. Translating complex scholarly work, she explains bigotry, ableism, eugenics, and how intersectional identities of race, class, sexuality, and gender, shape disability experiences. Through accessible language and genuine care, Barbarin engages communities outside of educational institutions, broadening examples of where and how Disability scholarship can exist. Her content creation is an example of what disability studies author and scholar, Shawna Sheperd-Murtagh, calls an act of "disabled digital storytelling … a form of grassroots activism and political imagination—one that insists on complex, joyful, and racially conscious forms of being."[140] Not only expressing pain or frustration (though this is present, and necessary), but "cultivating practices of joy, desire, and digital care work that resist the intersecting forces of ableism and racism,[141] Barbarin is performing acts of public disability scholarship which are "deliberate, political, and world-making."[142] Making scholastic Disability knowledge public, and digitally accessible, Barbarin, and other Disability-focused public scholars are constructing community spaces. Disability scholar Shayda Kafai analyzes digital crip connection in her 2021 book, *Crip Kinship*, writing:

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[137] Amanda Morris, "Disabled People Fear Twitter Changes under Elon Musk Leave Them Behind," *Washington Post*, November 18, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2022/11/18/disability-support-twitter-harassment/.

[138] Joseph Shapiro and Emma Bowman, "One Laid Groundwork for the ADA; the Other Grew up under Its Promises," NPR.org, July 26, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/07/26/895480926/the-americans-with-disabilities-act-was-signed-into-law-30-years-ago.

[139] Amanda Morris, "Disabled People Fear Twitter Changes under Elon Musk Leave Them Behind."

[140] Shawna Sheperd-Murtagh , "Disabled Content Creators' Collective Care."

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid.

> just as much as crip-centric liberated zones can be locations, they can also be a cultivation of feeling and experience; they can be found on blog posts, during workshops or webinars, or on websites. They can thrive in our bedrooms and on our computer screens when no one else is around.[143]

Kafai maintains that due to the accessibility and intersectional ability of these virtual spaces, digital crip communities resist isolation, and champion Disabled connection and knowledge-sharing in ways that physical, tangible spaces may struggle to achieve.[144]

When the body you are in (the body you are) refuses to cooperate with your goals or expectations, this frustration can be isolating. Digital crip spaces—while still flawed in accessibility—act as a respite from this loneliness. As a safe point of connection for scholarship, kinship, cross-disability solidarity, and building awareness, online communities play a crucial role in the broad experiences of crip intimacy.

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[143] Shayda Kafai, *Crip Kinship*, 45.
[144] Shayda Kafai, *Crip Kinship*, 119.

5. Emotional Intimacy: Family, Friendship, Opportunity

Say the name of a person / who has loved you into existence.[145] **-Jillian Christmas**

Dear Gabriel,

I have been so incredibly lucky to find friends who care about me in the same ways I care about them; friends who check in regularly, ask how my specialist appointments went, and don't mind when we pop by Monday evenings to vent and chat about our days. I am ever luckier to have two parents who have supported me throughout everything. My parents found my therapists and social workers, managed my IEP, drove me to all my doctor's appointments, believed my symptoms, and always listened to me when I told them I needed to go to the hospital.

mum & dad, thank you for trusting me when i told you i needed somewhere to go. thank you
for taking me to the hospital, that windy night in october all those years ago. i'm sorry that
was so scary; your only child, sobbing that her head was full of unspeakable thoughts,
begging to go to a safe place.

Often considered one of the most influential structures in society, family systems play an important role in the socialization and development of children.[146] We learn our morals, politics, habits, and communication with our families, and for disabled individuals, family can be even more developmentally impactful, "family interconnections are forged through learning to manage the life challenges that having a disability can bring, and the sense of belonging we

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[145] Jillian Christmas, *The Gospel of Breaking* (Vancouver, Bc: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2020), 36.

[146] Sonali Shah, "Role of Family in Empowering the Disabled Young People," *International Journal of Disability Studies* 4, no. 1 & 2 (January 2010): 100–125, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sonali-Shah-4/publication/283329325_Role_of_Family_in_Empowering_the_Young_Disabled_People/links/5633eb2b08ae88cf81ba50d5/Role-of-Family-in-Empowering-the-Young-Disabled-People.pdf.

derive through family relationships."[147] While disability within a family may increase the stresses of living, "individuals and families are remarkably resilient to the challenges that temporary and lifelong disabilities present."[148] Families often act as our support and care systems, the first people we bring our issues and fears to. Similarly, when you find close friends, these self-made kinships, or 'found-family', may become a system of support and care, as loving and interdependent as any 'traditional'[149] family unit.

Philadelphia-based artist Carolyn Lazard invited her family, found-family, and members of the public to *Support System (for Park, Tina, and Bob)* in 2016, "a durational performance during which the artist, confined to her bed, received a succession of visitors … who provided for her physical and emotional needs throughout the day."[150] Lazard received her BA in 2010 from Bard College and completed her MFA from the University of Pennsylvania in 2019. With a focus on practices of care, visibility, chronic illness, disability, dependance, and challenging ableism,[151] Lazard's creative works span the mediums of video, installation, sculpture, and performance. The title of Lazard's work, *Support System (for Park, Tina, and Bob)* offers recognition to three disabled artists: Park McArthur, Constantina Zavitsanos, and Bob Flanagan, and Lazard uses this naming practice to build a lineage for herself. Embedding their names within her work, she confronts the "prevailing assumption that the sick and disabled exist only in the present

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[147] Anne F Farrell and Gloria L Krahn, "Family Life Goes On: Disability in Contemporary Families," *Family Relations* 63, no. 1 (2014): 1–6, https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12053.
[148] Anne F Farrell and Gloria L Krahn, "Family Life Goes On: Disability in Contemporary Families."
[149] In this instance, 'Traditional' family refers to the household structure consisting of one or more adults raising their biological or adopted children, not the conventional, heteronormative, nuclear family. This household structure is not superior to any other, rather, it is used as a point of reference for support and interdependence amongst a group of 'related' people.
[150] Julia Pelta Feldman, "Support System (for Tina, Park, and Bob)," *Room & Board* (Room & Board, 2016), https://roomandboard.nyc/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/support-system-book-with-cover.pdf.
[151] Carolyn Lazard, "Carolyn Lazard," www.macfound.org, October 4, 2023, https://www.macfound.org/fellows/class-of-2023/carolyn-lazard.

moment."[152] Challenging the notion that disability is fleeting, shameful, and something to be hidden, Lazard's title provokes curiosity from the audience—who are Park, Tina, and Bob?—and establishes the history of disability art underpinning her creative practice. *Support System*'s title highlights the dependency of cultural production, proudly claiming her inspiration from other Disabled artists, and following in the rich legacy of disability art. Lazard's disability identity and art practice are informed by "a long lineage of Black, disabled and queer people"[153] including contemporaries and friends, noting "My practice doesn't exist in a vacuum: it is made in relation to the work of other artists who have come before me, and those whose work I learn about day to day."[154] Contending that individuation as an artist—while it is "the one way you can survive, make money and pay rent,"—is dishonest,[155] and creative practice must be situated through inspiration and interdependence.

Lazard reflects on representations of intimacy and chronic pain in her work *Support System (For Park, Tina, and Bob)*. A performance piece "completed by the artist where they spent the day in bed"[156] at a residential location from 9 am to 6 pm, "Members of the public were invited to sign up for a 30-minute slot … The cost of admission was one bouquet of flowers."[157] Addressing "convalescence, disabled sociality, collaborative art practice, and the transactional nature of emotional labour,"[158] this durational work additionally features representation of invisible illnesses and disabilities. In her review of *Support System*, curator, critic, and friend of Lazard,

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[152] Julia Pelta Feldman, "Support System (for Tina, Park, and Bob)."
[153] Carolyn Lazard, Carolyn Lazard on Illness, Intimacy and the Aesthetics of Access, interview by Edna Bonhomme, *FRIEZE*, February 28, 2022, https://www.frieze.com/article/carolyn-lazard-edna-bonhomme-interview-2022.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] "Carolyn Lazard," Cell Project Space (cellprojects, April 6, 2020), https://www.cellprojects.org/content/support-system.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.

Julia Pelta Feldman offers insight into Lazard's perspective of care, "Everyone needs care, but Carolyn has … a privileged perspective on its significance. Carolyn is chronically ill. That Carolyn often "passes" as a well person is part of the reason that she addresses illness and debility in her art: in order to make it visible."[159] Kelly Fritsch, associate professor at Carleton University, Ottawa, asserts that within the social model of disability, "People are made to be disabled by external barriers, like stairs, lack of accessible and affordable housing, inaccessible work environments, transportation systems, or social services."[160] However, those external barriers identified within the social model do not consider the disability of a body with illness, exhaustion, or chronic pain. In a performance with Sins Invalid, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha recites their spoken-word poetry:

> We were all just too sensitive. Fatigue too thick to make sense of phone, Trader Joe's, Laundromat, let alone meeting, party, dance floor. We go away.
> Sick. Sick.
> 'you sick again, girl? you still in bed it's three in the afternoon!'
> Shame makes our hips crumble to the floor, sticks us there.[161]

The expectations of the not-yet disabled population can be crushing. Family, friends, and strangers with the best intentions, can (and do) say the wrong thing. We all forget to be our most empathetic selves sometimes, but when the sensory overwhelm of pain and fatigue are already debilitating, small dismissals, digs, and judgement can be shattering.

In her creative production, Carolyn Lazard critiques definitions of productivity and the often transactional nature of care. Through her performance of *Support System*, Lazard may frame the

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[159] Julia Pelta Feldman, "Support System (for Tina, Park, and Bob)."
[160] Kelly Fritsch, "Desiring Disability Differently," 49.
[161] Sins Invalid and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, " Leah Lakshmi in Sins Invalid 2009 - Part 1," YouTube (Sins Invalid, April 27, 2010), https://youtu.be/K3eZp2DdlLA?si=xUJMKz4FYdwfQFTh.

time spent with friends and family as 'productive', the making of an artwork. That she "spent all day in bed is therefore both an instance of needed rest and the conspicuous performance of that need,"[162] a simultaneous demonstration of cultural production and self-care. The mandatory entrance fee for guests, a bouquet of flowers, serves as a physical metaphor of her needs; a resource dependent on others, and "a reminder that care, like art, is more often exchanged than freely given."[163] Additionally, this cost of entrance illustrates the shift in roles; artist as dependent consumer, and public as actor and provider, blurring the lines of production in performance.

Lazard's practice is informed by her lived experience with multiple autoimmune diseases. Passing as able-bodied, the nature of her chronic illness regulates the invisibility of her disabilities. Beginning as the attempt to "document [her] life in biomedical purgatory,[164] Lazard's creative practice engages with the constructions of disability visibility. In her statement for the Wynn Newhouse Awards, Lazard writes:

> Chronic illness is often seen as a private matter or a hyper-‑personal misfortune. It is rarely viewed as an experience deeply embedded in structures of power and meaning. As such, documenting chronic illness destabilizes the separation of public and private spheres. I often shoot or perform in doctor's offices or in my own home: spaces of extreme alienation or extreme domesticity are where I locate my disability. I like to turn these moments – medical procedures, administering medication, navigating medical bureaucracy, hospitalizations – into publicly consumable images or text.[165]

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[162] Julia Pelta Feldman, "Support System (for Tina, Park, and Bob)."
[163] Ibid.
[164] Carolyn Lazard, "Carolyn Lazard," www.wnewhouseawards.com, n.d., https://www.wnewhouseawards.com/carolynlazard.html.
[165] Ibid.

This positioning of disability visibility highlights her frustration with the failings of hegemonic healthcare systems,[166] and the important role personal relationships play in the avoidance of sole dependency of disability-care in medical institutions. Living with invisible or dynamic[167] disabilities often entail an awkward combination of identity-disclosure and activity avoidance.

there is this very annoying feeling (like f.o.m.o,[168] but worse) when you desperately want to do something—hangout with friends, do laundry, write your fucking mfa thesis—but your symptoms prevent your action. sometimes having to explain to friends, family, and strangers that something is simply beyond your (current) reach is brutal, and often made more difficult when the desired action was possible earlier (this is also often noted by friends, family, and strangers, which might suck even more).

Being dynamically disabled in public is frustrating; the inelegant ways in which strangers will approach your change in mobility aids, or comment the classic, "you're too young to be in pain."

this is one of my least favourite remarks of all time, as if pain or disability have an age limit. like i haven't lived long enough to know what 'real' pain is. too young to experience body aches and vertigo and nausea and dizziness and compulsions and intrusive thoughts and un-ending fucking pain.

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[166] Carolyn Lazard, Carolyn Lazard on Illness, Intimacy and the Aesthetics of Access.

[167] Dynamic disabilities are defined as disabilities which oscillate in severity (normally tied to what is called a "flare"), where all or one of the symptoms of a chronic illness are more active or worsen for a period of time, whether it's for a matter of weeks or months. Inês Malia Sarmento, "Dynamic Disability - DisArt," DisArt, May 4, 2021, https://www.disartnow.org/journal/dynamic-disability/.

[168] F.O.M.O is an acronym for 'Fear of missing out'

There is a meme that floats around in chronic illness communities online, most recently I saw it as an Instagram Reels video with a trending audio.[169] The premise is "When your invisible disability becomes temporarily visible and you have to explain yourself to everyone at work," which often becomes a terribly awkward conversation dripping in pity or infantilization.

27th july 2025

i brought my cane to work today. this is pretty uncommon as my job requires a lot of sitting and i don't generally find i need it, but today, during a flare up, i used my cane (decked out in stickers and bright purple) it's not exactly subtle.

during intermission (i work in community theatre), a patron asked me, "are you holding that for someone?" and i told her that it was mine, she responded with a sad smile, a look up and down my body, and a "god bless."

today, the intimacy i shared was that of commiseration with my co-worker, who shared my awkwardness of this comment.

thank you daniela, you made me feel seen and understood.

Lazard's performance of *Support System* displays the intimacy of living with chronic illness without shame. By honestly representing the demands of her conditions, and working in a manner that respects her body and the disability community she is part of,[170] Carolyn Lazard's work embodies the intimacy of interdependence and care, and the ways in which family and friends can support us when we struggle to support ourselves.

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[169] dizzyissy__, "When Your Invisible Illness Becomes Temporarily Visible and You Have to Explain Yourself to Everyone at Work," Instagram Reel, *Instagram*, September 4, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/reel/DOLORQ-ktFV/?igsh=MTV0dGt2ajNmMWIyaQ==.

[170] Carolyn Lazard, "Carolyn Lazard."

years of therapy, meetings with high school social workers, doctors. i must be receptive to feedback and criticism. i will not be spoken down to, but i will try to learn and grow from advice and support. post-socialization debrief: (gabriel explains when I said things that people probably didn’t want to hear) criticism and hurt must roll off my back. i know my loved ones are here to support me, they know i am here to support them. i love you gabriel. thank you.

6. Crip Time/Care Time (Futures and Love Notes)

> **No one can tell what goes on in between the person you were and the person you become. No one can chart that blue and lonely section of hell. There are no maps of the change. You just come out the other side. Or you don't.[171] -Stephen King**

Dear Gabriel,

Disability is the one marginalized group you can join at any time (and you probably will). Contemporary artists, curators, and collectives Sins Invalid, Sarah Faux, Emma Jones, and Carolyn Lazard are exploring the expansions of intimacy through Disability identity and art-making, depicting the joyful sanctuary of crip communities and broadened intimacy. As cultural producers, these artists, curators, and collectives construct creative work which publicize the ways in which Disability-identity expands the feeling and appearance of 'intimacy.' Author and professor of queer, feminist, and disability studies, Alison Kafer, coined the term ‘crip time’ as a reorientation of time which rejects the ableist proposal that productivity determines a person’s worth, and instead advocates for rest, care, and alternative pacing.[172] I work through sporadic bursts of intensity—like the Creature leading Victor into the arctic—I leave clues to be decoded, and write in active, vengeful pursuit. My dream is not to reckon with my maker, but to learn more about myself; how disability has shaped my intimate experiences and continues to influence my approach to care. In my own crip-methodology, time for rest, intimacy, kinship, and solitude is vitally important. I cannot punish myself for my body’s communication, I will not feel shame when I acknowledge my limits.

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[171] Stephen King, *The Stand* (1978; reprinted, New York: Anchor Books, 2012), 449.

[172] Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

Intimacy should be freely given, and lovingly received. Intimacy—like ‘crip time’—does not rely on productivity, independence, or extraction, but instead supports greater expressions of reciprocity, growth, and care. Disability-identities influence intimacy—affecting the kinds of care that we crave—and the delight of satisfying, accessible, sexual, digital, or platonic intimate interactions provoke crip joy like nothing else.

as my own act of creative, intimate, crip joy, this thesis has been written as a giant love letter to you gabriel, and to conclude this work, i offer some shorter, but no-less important, love notes to my crip kin, my support system, and my future.

Dear Alice,

Your work is endlessly inspiring and the world mourns your loss. We will honour you on March 25th, at your celebration of life, and together, continue your legacy of action. Your anthologies, *Disability Visibility*, and *Disability Intimacy*, as well as your memoir, *Year of the Tiger: An Activist's Life*, will continue to shape the scholarship, community, and the care of your crip kin for generations. You inspire me constantly, and from one disabled fungi to another, our mycelial network is grieving this epic loss.

I'm dreaming of your continued journey, of your life on the moon, and your all-Asian disabled punk band. I'm dreaming of tigers, and shiitake mushrooms, and eSims for Gaza, and the legacy you've built. I'm sending love and care to your family and loved ones.

Alice, we miss you, we cherish you, thank you for everything you are.

Dear Temple,

To me, you've come to represent an intricate world of theory and scholarship I have yet to learn and eagerly welcome.

In the future, I dream of students learning in ways accessible to them, and becoming the teacher who understands and appreciates the extensive diversity in cognitive learning styles. In my scholarship, I hope to explore ideas of multiply-disabled identities, neurodiversity, and spectrums of disability. You are one of the people who has made my work possible, breaking down years of shame and stigma surrounding autism (especially in women).

There is no definitive disability scholarship, and while I cannot say that your experiences reflect mine, I am so excited to contribute to the research, writing, and perception of autism and disability alongside scholars like you.

Temple, thank you for ushering in a future of opportunities for autistic girls and women. Thank you for making yourself visible in this progress. Thank you for proving the value of personalized Disability research.

Dear Zofran,

Sometimes I think I hate you.

I feel like crap, my head spins, I drink water, I can't move without moaning from nausea and pain. I grab your shiny package, I try to strip the foil, poking my figures into the blister strip, I pop you out. Water at the ready, I place you on my tongue (unless I get the dissolvable kind, which is honestly my preference but it's rarely available at the pharmacy) and sip my water to get you down. Sometimes, I choke a little; I've never been very good at swallowing pills, and I often get that terrible *caught in the throat but can't wash down* feeling. I wait those awful 30 minutes … and sometimes longer … and sometimes you never kick in.

Sometimes, when you do work, I think I love you.

When you give me my day back (back from nausea and laying in bed on my side, the only position which seems possible), when you calm the waves of nausea which crash over me, try to pull me into their tide. When you free my stomach and brain from the swirling merry-go-round of a salivating mouth and spinning vertigo, I think I love you then.

I whisper your name (ondansetron) over and over, hoping that by repeating this chant you will start to work faster, start to help me, or just work at all. I watch medical dramas and the doctors call out to administer you. You work your way into the patient's system, and suddenly the patient feels better. I resent that you always seem to work in these medical dramas, but fail me like half the time.

I love you, I hate you, I wish you worked, I'm glad you work sometimes.

Dear Sins Invalid, Sarah Faux, Emma Jones, and Carolyn Lazard,

The work you do is important. You create the crip-futures I dream of, spaces of access and care, bodies which play and seem pleasure despite pain, communities which find connection any way possible, the intimate platonic relationships of care and understanding and history. I hope that when people see your works, they can recognize this power. I hope no one ever stops showing up for you.

I envision futures which crush ableism, and end the suppression of Disabled voices in cultural creation. I am trying to fashion a world where Disabled people can make shit, and people show up for them. Thank you for your inspiration, your time, your creativity, and your resilience to the systems which try to push us down.

You are beautiful and important. Thank you forever.

Dear reader,

The year I’ve been working on this research has been full of dozens of card games, hundreds of hours of playing The Sims 4, countless excellent meals, 2 accidental all-nighters, seemingly innumerable doctor’s appointments, weeks of nausea, and at least one instance of fall-on-the-floor-laughter. All things considered, it has been a great year. Great because it was filled with love, laughter, music, grief, a tiny cat, and my favourite people.

This thesis gave me the extraordinary opportunity to personalize my work, to express the intimate, and to be vulnerable. My hope is that in reading this work, you may come away with a greater understanding of the connection between intimacy and disability, and if you are Disabled, that you may recognize yourself in these pages. It has been my pleasure to reflect upon the practices of these artists, and their work; finding communities grounded in access, paintings alive with emotion and pleasure, digital spaces of crip kinship, and the gift of time with loved ones and strangers.

Thank you for joining me in this intimate reflection.

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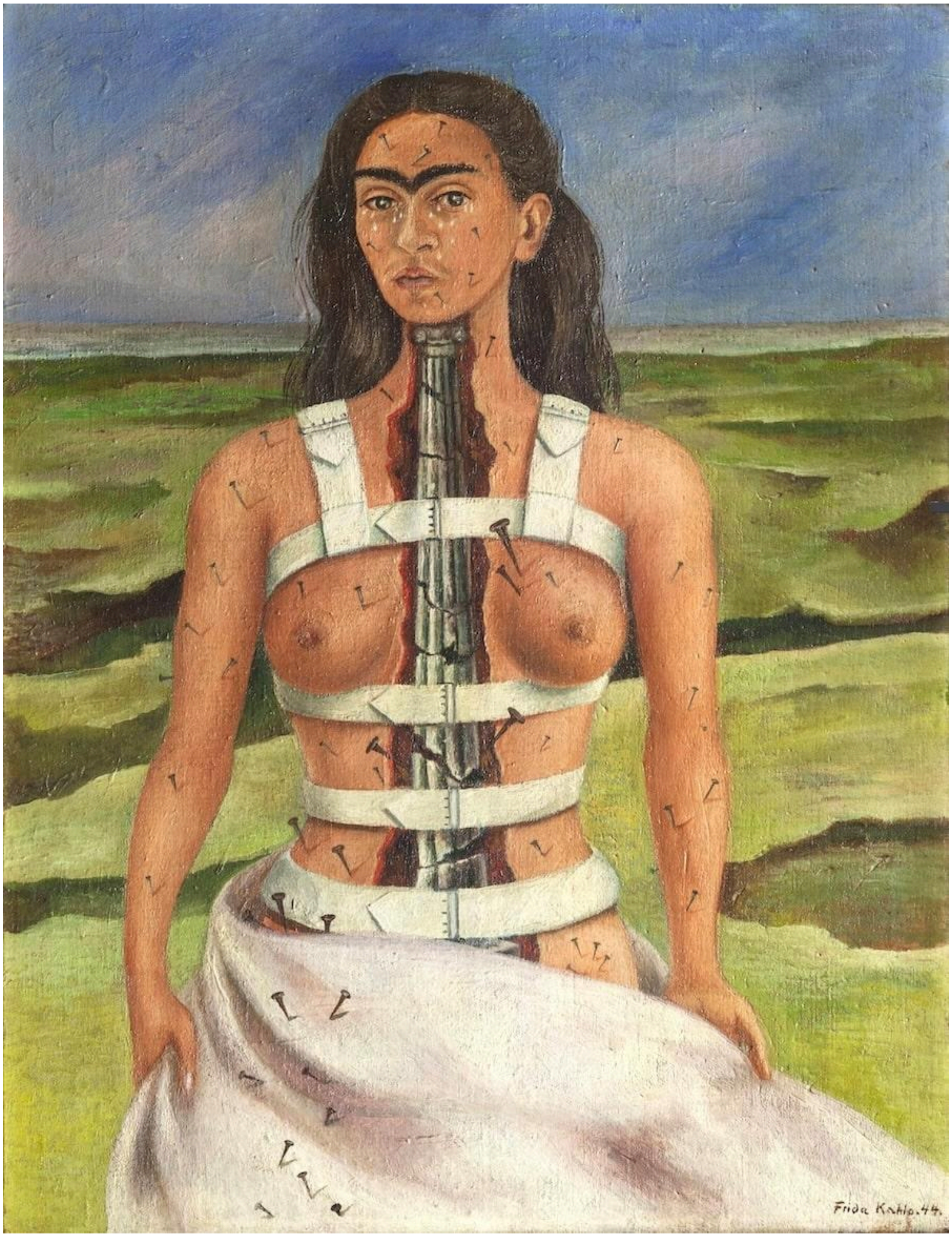

Figure 1: Frida Kahlo, *The Broken Column*, 1944, oil on panel. Courtesy of fair use policy and public domain.[173]

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[173] Reed Enger, "Educational Fair Use," Obelisk Art History, October 27, 2015, http://www.arthistoryproject.com/about/copyright-information/copyrighted-material.

Figure 2: Rodney Bell, Sins Invalid Opening Performance, 2008, digital image. Photo courtesy of Sins Invalid.

Figure 3: Sarah Faux, *Little trouble girl*, 2023, oil on canvas, 94 x 136 inches (diptych). Photo by JSP Art Photography, courtesy of the artist and Hales Gallery.

Sleep Apnea Swine Flu Complications Genetic Hip Disorder

Menieres Ulcerative Colitis Epilepsy

Figure 4: The Geography of Illness, *The Nightstand Collective*, 2015-present, digital images.

Photos by anonymous submissions, courtesy of the curator Emma Jones.

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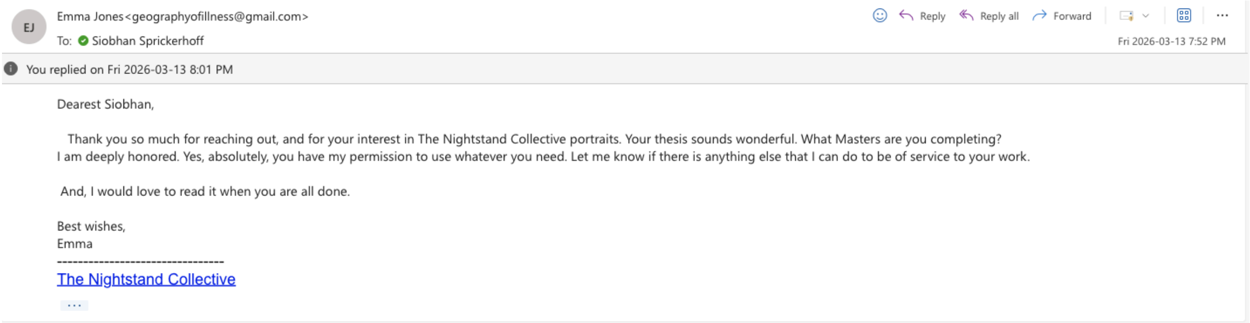
Approvals



Emma Jones<geographyofillness@gmail.com>
To: Siobhan Sprickerhoff
Fri 2026-03-13 7:52 PM

You replied on Fri 2026-03-13 8:01 PM

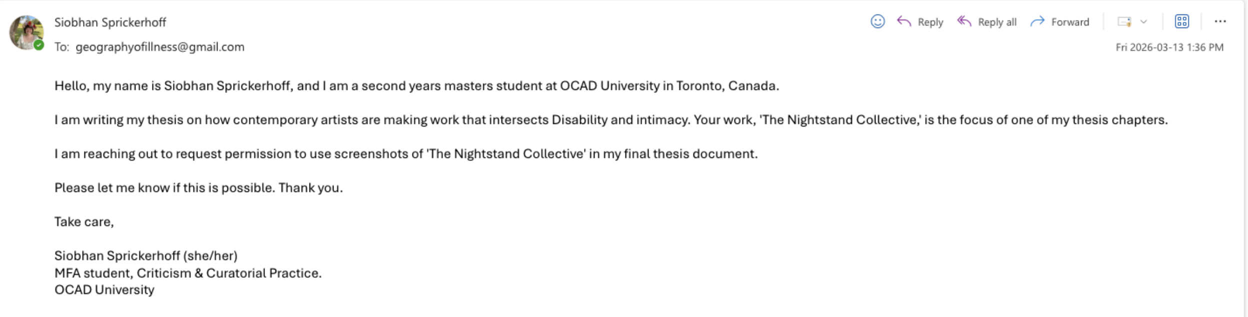
Dearest Siobhan,

Thank you so much for reaching out, and for your interest in The Nightstand Collective portraits. Your thesis sounds wonderful. What Masters are you completing?
I am deeply honored. Yes, absolutely, you have my permission to use whatever you need. Let me know if there is anything else that I can do to be of service to your work.

And, I would love to read it when you are all done.

Best wishes,
Emma

The Nightstand Collective



Siobhan Sprickerhoff
To: geographyofillness@gmail.com
Fri 2026-03-13 1:36 PM

Hello, my name is Siobhan Sprickerhoff, and I am a second years masters student at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada.

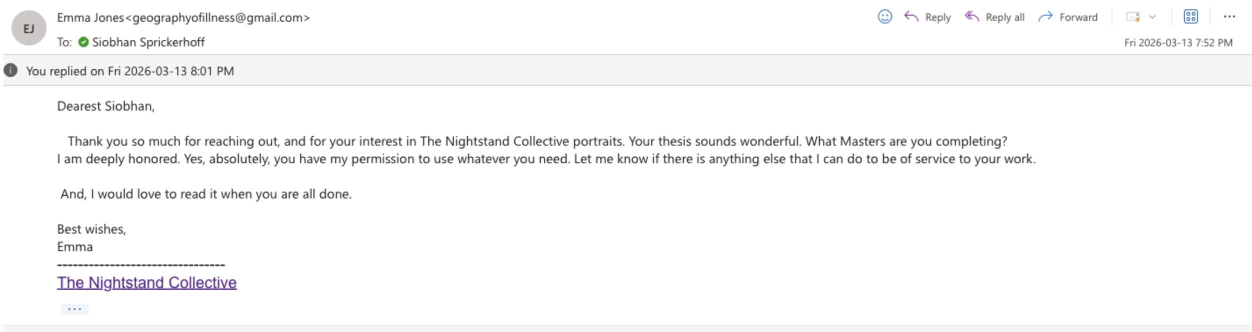
I am writing my thesis on how contemporary artists are making work that intersects Disability and intimacy. Your work, 'The Nightstand Collective,' is the focus of one of my thesis chapters.

I am reaching out to request permission to use screenshots of 'The Nightstand Collective' in my final thesis document.

Please let me know if this is possible. Thank you.

Take care,

Siobhan Sprickerhoff (she/her)
MFA student, Criticism & Curatorial Practice.
OCAD University



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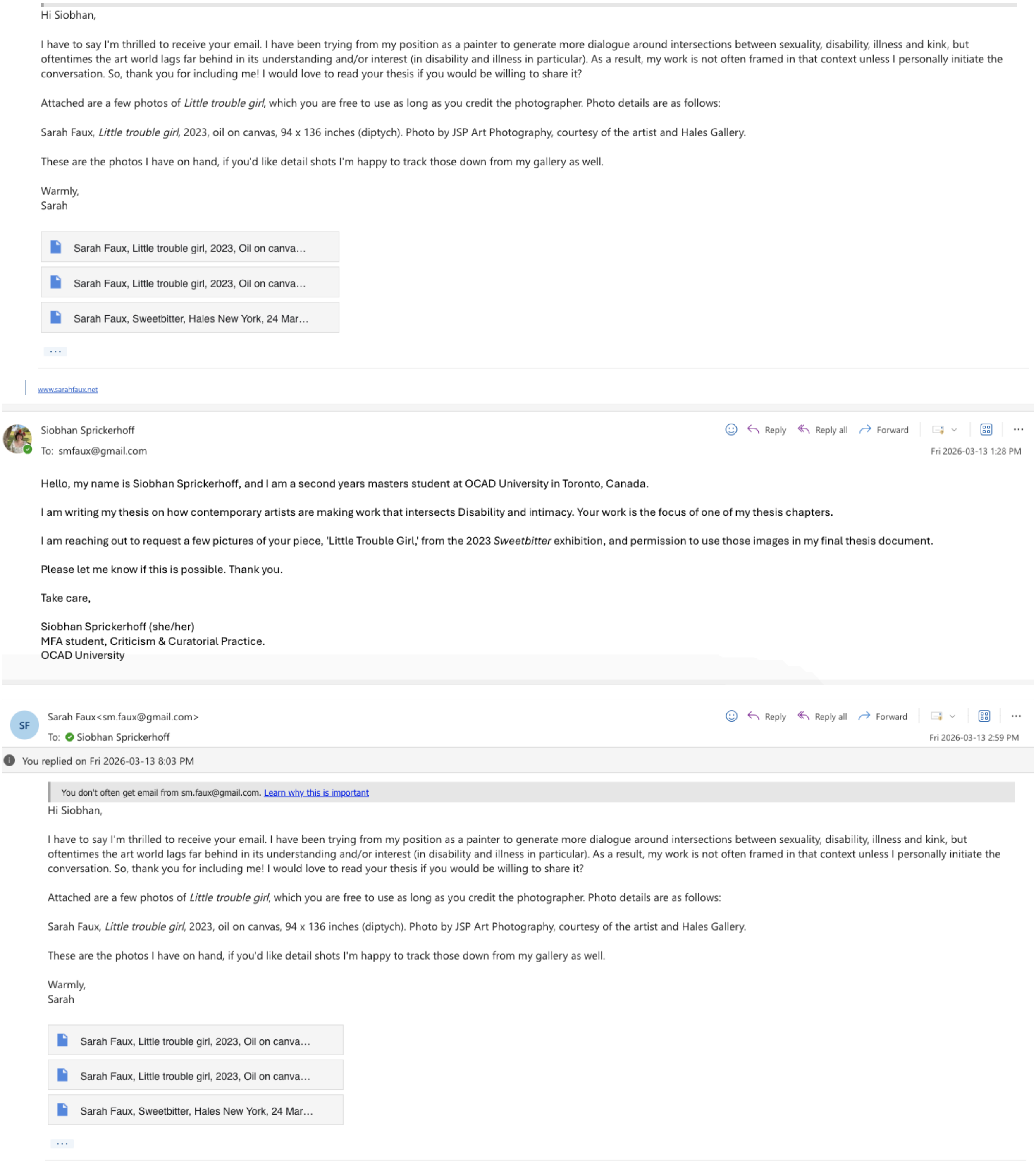

Hi Siobhan,

I have to say I'm thrilled to receive your email. I have been trying from my position as a painter to generate more dialogue around intersections between sexuality, disability, illness and kink, but oftentimes the art world lags far behind in its understanding and/or interest (in disability and illness in particular). As a result, my work is not often framed in that context unless I personally initiate the conversation. So, thank you for including me! I would love to read your thesis if you would be willing to share it?

Attached are a few photos of *Little trouble girl*, which you are free to use as long as you credit the photographer. Photo details are as follows:

Sarah Faux, *Little trouble girl*, 2023, oil on canvas, 94 x 136 inches (diptych). Photo by JSP Art Photography, courtesy of the artist and Hales Gallery.

These are the photos I have on hand, if you'd like detail shots I'm happy to track those down from my gallery as well.

Warmly,
Sarah

Sarah Faux, Little trouble girl, 2023, Oil on canva…
Sarah Faux, Little trouble girl, 2023, Oil on canva…
Sarah Faux, Sweetbitter, Hales New York, 24 Mar…

www.sarahfaux.net

Siobhan Sprickerhoff
To: smfaux@gmail.com
Fri 2026-03-13 1:28 PM

Hello, my name is Siobhan Sprickerhoff, and I am a second years masters student at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada.

I am writing my thesis on how contemporary artists are making work that intersects Disability and intimacy. Your work is the focus of one of my thesis chapters.

I am reaching out to request a few pictures of your piece, 'Little Trouble Girl,' from the 2023 *Sweetbitter* exhibition, and permission to use those images in my final thesis document.

Please let me know if this is possible. Thank you.

Take care,

Siobhan Sprickerhoff (she/her)
MFA student, Criticism & Curatorial Practice.
OCAD University

SF
Sarah Faux<sm.faux@gmail.com>
To: Siobhan Sprickerhoff
Fri 2026-03-13 2:59 PM

You replied on Fri 2026-03-13 8:03 PM

You don't often get email from sm.faux@gmail.com. Learn why this is important

Hi Siobhan,

I have to say I'm thrilled to receive your email. I have been trying from my position as a painter to generate more dialogue around intersections between sexuality, disability, illness and kink, but oftentimes the art world lags far behind in its understanding and/or interest (in disability and illness in particular). As a result, my work is not often framed in that context unless I personally initiate the conversation. So, thank you for including me! I would love to read your thesis if you would be willing to share it?

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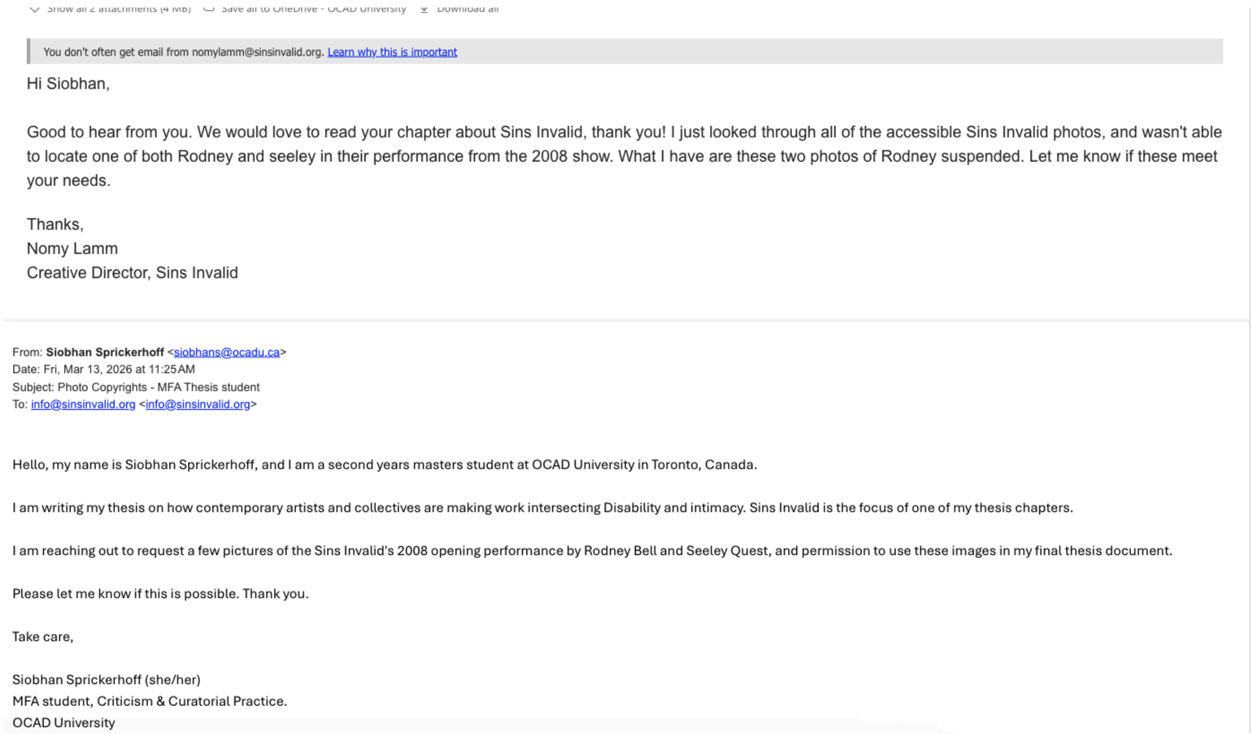


You don't often get email from nomylamm@sinsinvalid.org. Learn why this is important

Hi Siobhan,

Good to hear from you. We would love to read your chapter about Sins Invalid, thank you! I just looked through all of the accessible Sins Invalid photos, and wasn't able to locate one of both Rodney and seeley in their performance from the 2008 show. What I have are these two photos of Rodney suspended. Let me know if these meet your needs.

Thanks,
Nomy Lamm
Creative Director, Sins Invalid

From: **Siobhan Sprickerhoff** <siobhans@ocadu.ca>
Date: Fri, Mar 13, 2026 at 11:25AM
Subject: Photo Copyrights - MFA Thesis student
To: info@sinsinvalid.org <info@sinsinvalid.org>

Hello, my name is Siobhan Sprickerhoff, and I am a second years masters student at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada.

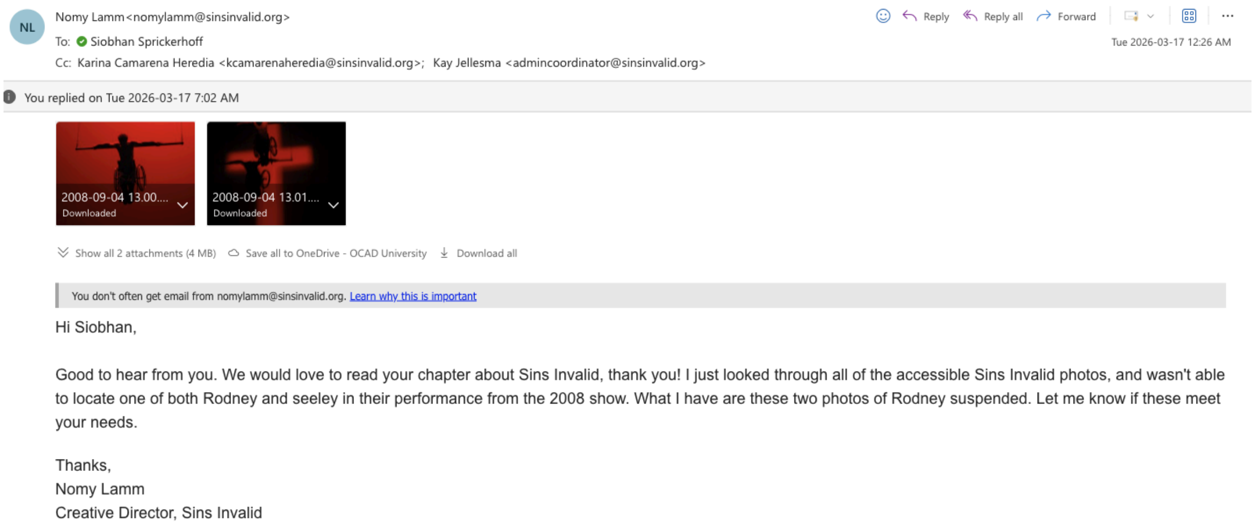
I am writing my thesis on how contemporary artists and collectives are making work intersecting Disability and intimacy. Sins Invalid is the focus of one of my thesis chapters.

I am reaching out to request a few pictures of the Sins Invalid's 2008 opening performance by Rodney Bell and Seeley Quest, and permission to use these images in my final thesis document.

Please let me know if this is possible. Thank you.

Take care,

Siobhan Sprickerhoff (she/her)
MFA student, Criticism & Curatorial Practice.
OCAD University



Nomy Lamm<nomylamm@sinsinvalid.org>
To: Siobhan Sprickerhoff
Cc: Karina Camarena Heredia <kcamarenaheredia@sinsinvalid.org>; Kay Jellesma <admincoordinator@sinsinvalid.org>
Tue 2026-03-17 12:26 AM

You replied on Tue 2026-03-17 7:02 AM

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