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**Stories of Methodology:**

**Interviewing Sideways, Crooked and Crip**

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**Abstract**

In this article, written in a combination of collaborative and singular voices, we tell the stories of shaping an interdependent crip methodology while conducting a qualitative interview study with 33 disabled faculty members. Our central argument is that disability cripps methodology. In other words, centering disability from the beginning of a research project, and committing to collective access, reveal specific ways that disability changes the assumptions and outcomes that ordinarily characterize—or are assumed to characterize—research situations. To illuminate those specific ways, we focus on three dimensions of qualitative research that emerged as particularly important to our interdependent methodology: time, gaze, and emotion.

**Keywords**

Methodology; Crip; Time; Gaze; Emotion; Interdependence

**Stories of Methodology: Interviewing Sideways, Crooked and Crip**

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*[Price and Kerschbaum]* For a couple of years now, we've been telling our stories in straight lines. We wrote grant proposals stating exactly how many interviews we'd do, where they would be located, how much the train tickets would cost. We presented data to audiences of educators, administrators, and colleagues in disciplines ranging from English to rehabilitation sciences. We've stressed reliability and significance. We've omitted the first person in (some of) our reports. We've toed (some of) the lines.

In saying this, we don't mean we're complicit with ableist or otherwise reductive methodologies; on the contrary, we have learned a great deal about the creativity and grace required for activities such as conducting statistical analyses. But we have been steering away from speaking through first-person stories, because the audiences we've been working to persuade tend to listen to different kinds of language, a different understanding of how data signify.

Ironically, at the same time that we've been arguing for the broad significance and (to a degree) generalizability of our work, we've been diving deep into individuals' stories. At this moment (summer 2016), we are in the final stages of data-gathering for an interview study with disabled faculty. With 33 interviews complete, we are saturated in stories. And we're bursting with our own stories, too, because we've learned that two disabled researchers conducting a collaborative interview study with disabled faculty is anything but simple.

This webtext includes some stories from our interviewees, but it is primarily the story(ies) of us as researchers, finding our way as we go, moving sideways and crooked and crip into an [interdependent disability-studies \(DS\) methodology](#).

Beginning with the next section, “[Disability crips methodology](#),” our stories and analysis will flow outward in a non-linear pattern. You can reach other sections of this webtext by clicking on hyperlinks that label concepts such as [interdependent](#) or [time](#). In other words, you can engage associatively through this webtext, reading only the stories or sections that are of interest to you. You can also engage with this webtext in a more linear fashion, if you prefer, by reading the main sections in the order they appear here:

[Disability crips methodology](#)

[DS methodology](#)

[Our interdependent methodology](#)

[Time](#)

[Gaze](#)

[Emotion](#)

### **Disability crips methodology**

*[Price and Kerschbaum]* As we worked on our interviews, slowly completing more and more over the course of three years, we came to a realization:

Disability crips methodology.

In other words, when disability is assumed to be an important part of the qualitative interview situation (rather than something external that “enters” the situation and then must be accommodated or compensated for), the interview’s normative framework is both exposed and challenged. Crucially, our choices as researchers are not simply an effort to make the interview

space more “inclusive” by retrofitting previous interview methodologies. Rather, they compose a process of crippling the interview space itself—restructuring it and reconsidering the power dynamics that give rise to its normative structure.

Our methodology draws upon grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1994), narrative analysis (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Wolf, 1992), and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2012), as well as the [disability-studies researchers who have preceded us](#). Bringing together these approaches gave us some structure to work with. For example, we began as most grounded-theory projects do, with an open-coding process, through which themes emerged as we repeatedly reviewed interviews and transcripts. Our emphasis on discourse analysis has pushed us to think systematically about language choices and other discursive features of our interviewees’ stories. For example, Margaret noted that interviewees reported disclosing disability through a great variety of modes and media, including face-to-face speech and sign; email; the choice of particular attire (for example, a t-shirt reading “I’m bipolar, what’s your excuse?”); through gestures; in public or semi-public online writing (such as blogs and social media posts); in professional documents; via check boxes on accommodation forms; through the presence of embodied technologies such as prosthetics; through the presence of interpreters or captioners; and through artifacts kept in their work spaces. And narrative analysis has enabled us to focus on participants’ storying of themselves and their identities, with particular emphasis on narrative-in-interaction. Such narratives cannot be separated from their local contexts, and must be understood as rhetorical in nature (Phelan, 1996) and emergent within specific situations (Georgakopoulou, 2007). Finally, our general framework of feminist DS methodology has enabled us to foreground concerns such as reciprocity, representation, and accessibility (see Garland-Thomson, 2011a).

But in some cases, we distance ourselves from conventional assumptions of the methodologies we draw upon. For example, we challenge the assumption that a semi-structured interview should proceed like an oral/aural conversation, and that the ideal interviewer should be conventionally abled—or even super-abled (see Kerschbaum and Price, in progress). Drawing on Price (2011), we call the methodology we’ve developed an [interdependent disability studies methodology](#). This approach follows Kafer (2013), who contends that a methodology of questioning is “resolutely a work in progress, open-ended, aiming for but never reaching the horizon” (p. 18), and Garland-Thomson (2011a), who similarly suggests that a feminist DS methodology “asks difficult questions but accepts provisional answers,” privileging “the partial, the provisional, the particular” (pp. 40-42). One of our purposes in telling stories is to offer them as opportunities to reflect deeply on the beauty, complexity, and pain of research. Examining these moments carefully, not glossing over them too quickly, and simply sharing them with our DS community—allowing them to be witnessed—are ways of offering both the engagement and the crip irresolution Kafer and Garland-Thomson suggest. To that end, we are choosing to write this article “sideways, crooked and crip” because it doesn’t have a neat resolution. Many of the questions we raise here, many of the details of our experience, are still open and evolving—sometimes in uncomfortable ways.

Our collaborative process in creating this article involved reviewing the numerous instant message (IM) chats, email exchanges, and posts on the shared research blog that we generated over the three years of designing and implementing this interview study. As we reviewed and discussed together, the key themes of [time](#), [gaze](#), and [emotion](#) came into focus as points of productive, interdependent tension that were worth holding up and exploring further. As we identified these tensions, we returned to the interviews themselves, coding them for these

concepts, while also further documenting and reflecting upon our own affective, material, embodied, and situated presences during these interviews and beyond. As our stories reveal, even when just one of us was doing an interview, the other was never very far from awareness, as when Stephanie and an interview participant concluded their interview by waving to the camera and saying, “Hi Margaret!” In storying these experiences, we recognize that we are actors and characters in these interviews, and that our own needs as researchers are not incidental—but integral—to the research process and the data we generated with study participants.

### **DS methodology**

[*Price and Kerschbaum*] Our stories are contextualized with the following short history of DS methodology, because from the beginning, DS scholars have understood that methodology is a key mechanism of disabled peoples’ oppression, and that taking back our methodologies is a means of fighting back. Indeed, as Julie Avril Minich (2016) argues, critical disability studies (CDS) is *itself* a methodology, one that involves “scrutinizing not bodily or mental impairments but the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations” (para. 6). In other words, CDS is not about studying the supposedly broken bodyminds of the abject. Rather, it is about studying broken systems, broken attitudes, broken gazes. We add to Minich’s argument that to call CDS a methodology is to re-claim the inseparability of disability activism *plus* theory, a claim going back decades.

Mike Oliver’s (1992) “Changing the Social Relations of Research Production?” was a formative call to action, arguing that disabled people should be not the objects of research on disability, but the producers of it. Following Oliver, other disability-studies researchers in the UK, including Colin Barnes, Mark Priestley, Emma Stone, Geof Mercer, Peter Beresford, and

Jan Wallcraft developed the notion of DS methodology as an “emancipatory” practice, emphasizing the point that disabled people, and organizations controlled by disabled people, should set the agenda for disability-related research. In a retrospective article, Barnes (2002) notes that what was originally called “emancipatory” research converged over time with other paradigms, such as action research and other participatory approaches.

Disability researchers outside the UK, including Michelle Fine, have also taken up questions of methodology (Fine et al., 2002), and important insights have appeared with/in empirical studies not solely focused on methodology. For example, Brenda Brueggemann’s (1999) *Lend Me Your Ear* points out not only the oralist/auralist conventions of writing instruction, but also of qualitative interviewing. In an endnote describing the layered languages through which her interviews proceeded, Brueggemann describes interviews that took place both with and without an interpreter, in combinations of English and American Sign Language (ASL), and sometimes in “various forms of English-ASL ‘contact’ languages—SimCom [simultaneous communication] and Pidgin Sign English most notable among them” (p. 48, n. 33). She also emphasizes the complex rhetorical process involved in presenting interviewees’ ideas in writing, since non-“standard” English utterances are often read as inferior: “I have chosen to interpret, transliterate, and then quote what was ‘said’ into its approximate English equivalent, as well as I could” (p. 48, n. 33). This is an important linguistic and methodological choice, one which Brueggemann makes transparent by describing her methodology.

Brueggemann further addresses the methodology of her Gallaudet study in an article, “Still-Life” (1996), which challenges long-cherished ideas from feminist and qualitative research, including the call for extensive “reflexivity.” Provocatively, Brueggemann suggests that such reflexivity might unintentionally function to “put *ourselves* back at the center of our



talk" (p. 19, emphasis in original). Moreover, Brueggemann points out in "Still-Life" that although feminist researchers have called for collaboration with participants, "I do not think it entirely ethical that we unequivocally assume that they want to be involved, to collaborate, to respond, to co-construct representations with us" (p. 33). In other words, it is not automatically the most respectful, most ethical thing to do to ask participants for more and more of their time and effort; in some cases, it is more respectful to realize that they may not wish to be involved in the process of composing representations. Brueggemann's DS work (as well as that of Kafer, 2013, and Garland-Thomson, 2011a) demonstrate that there is much to re-think in feminist methodology.

Like other feminist researchers, Brueggemann encourages critical re-examination of concepts such as "reciprocity," emphasizing that how such concepts are understood has everything to do with standpoint (or, to use the term coined by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011a), sitpoint). More recent work, such as Elisabeth Miller's (2016) interview study with adults with aphasia, exposes a major assumption of qualitative interviewing (an assumption that many DS studies, including ours, upholds): namely, that an "interview" takes place primarily in linguistic form. Miller's interviews include communicative methods such as pointing and drawing. These approaches, as Miller argues, are not simply accommodations but also reveal a "misfit" (Garland-Thomson, 2011b) between her participants' literate practices and the assumptions of most qualitative interview methodologies.

Price's (2012) "Disability Studies Methodology" reviews a wide-ranging collection of DS research and identifies four core principles that persist across various disability-oriented methodological traditions and disciplines: access, activism, identification, and representation (p. 165). These areas, Price argues, serve as "contact zones" (Pratt, 1991) and potential sites of

discussion for DS researchers, who work from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Representation, one of the principles Price identifies, has received intense attention from DS researchers in the last few years. For example, Joan M. Ostrove and Jennifer Rinaldi co-edited a 2013 special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly* on “Self-reflection as Scholarly Praxis: Researcher Identity in Disability Studies.” The astonishing range of perspectives in this special issue (as well as other *DSQ* articles that have explored representation in empirical work, such as Selznick, 2015) demonstrates that DS methodology has emerged as a multi-disciplinary, sometimes contentious, area of study in its own right.

At the same time—we feel compelled to add—in this contemporary moment of racialized violence, neoliberal education, private control of massive research funds, and digital surveillance, DS methodology has many more questions to grapple with. For example: With increasing numbers of authors (and for-profit publishers) labeling their work “disability studies,” do we need to re-open Simi Linton’s (1998) question about what sort of disability research is “not disability studies”? That is, do we need to re-focus on research that purports to “include” disabled people while actually profiting off them? Further, questions about representation in DS research must extend to critical issues of power and privilege around race, gender and class as well as disability? The meaning of “disability studies methodology” cannot be arrived at, but must continue to be challenged, and changed, as both the world and the meaning of *disability* itself change.

### **Interdependent methodology**

[Price and Kerschbaum] Our study follows what we are terming an “interdependent accessible research paradigm,” first developed in Margaret’s book *Mad at School* (2011) and further refined

over the course of the present study. Over and over again, we've realized that it is truly an interdependent project for both of us. Neither of us could have done this study alone, and what has become possible in the course of doing it has become so because of our interdependent collaboration.

Interdependence is a central tenet in DS, focused on care, commitment, and acting with others in mutually-dependent relationships; however, DS scholarship doesn't always acknowledge that asymmetrical power relationships, including those that involve intersectional identities of race, class, gender, sexuality, and different kinds of disability, deeply affect what "interdependence" means in specific situations and how it is practiced. As researchers, we strove to make our own interdependent methodology one that adhered to collective principles, following the argument by disability-justice writer Mia Mingus (2010) about creating collective access (CCA). Mingus emphasizes that collective access is not only about achieving things together, but also being limited together:

One of the most important pieces of CCA [creating collective access] for me was a continued commitment to move together as crips and comrades. Every time I attempt to move through the world with other disabled folks, I am always so astounded at how hard it is for disabled people to stay together, literally. I watch how the world separates, isolates and divides us, so that we cannot move together. I watch how it is constructed for us to move with non-disabled people, instead of each other; and how it discourages folks with *different* disabilities from moving together. (n.p.)

As differently disabled researchers, we strove to follow the principle set out by Mingus of being collectively enabled and collectively limited, so that "if you can't go, I don't want to go."

*Committing to Collective Access*

Composing our commitment to collective access—i.e., access not just for our participants alone, or for us alone, but for all of us together—meant making that commitment explicit from the outset of the study. For example, one of our early decisions was to open a dialogue with potential participants before arranging the interviews. We asked each potential participant to fill out a short questionnaire that asked, among other things, what medium they would prefer for their interview (offering a choice of face-to-face, email, instant message, video-conference, telephone, and “other” to leave space for other suggestions). Most volunteers selected some but not all of the options. Some volunteers, however, selected all of them. This became another source of questions: were they selecting every option because they were equally comfortable with all modalities? Or because they wanted to be flexible to our preferences as researchers? There was no real way to know, of course, without opening that conversation. We wondered: Should we go ahead and select our own preference, or was further dialogue a better way to go?

These questions felt momentous, weighty, not incidental, even as looking back it seems obvious to say “Just ask people how they feel, what they want.” We were acutely conscious that we were asking people to be generous with their time and share their experiences with us, and wanted very much not to be overly demanding or difficult. Stephanie recalls going back and forth about contacting one participant in particular, as she wondered whether she should invite conversation about their preferences, or simply suggest her own preference given that they did check off that modality in the intake survey.

Conveying a message about access as a commitment is a means of welcoming participation, and of making decisions about materials, resources, and relationships we would use and build in the course of our work. Sometimes it was tough to figure out who should

interview whom, and in what setting, because not only were there many limiting factors involved, we were also contending with [our own emotional reactions](#) to entering such a wide array of communicative arenas.

Over the course of three years, interviews proceeded in a variety of ways, including in-person, telephone with captioning or with interpreting, videoconference, email, and typed instant message. Technologies used have also varied, including video cameras, laptops, and (once, when the camera ran out of memory mid-interview) smartphones. Because we wanted to record rich detail of interviews and interactions, we captured almost all of our interviews on video, with the exception of those that occurred asynchronously, such as email interviews. We have video files of instant message conversations proceeding, of Skype screen-captures, of Stephanie sitting at a monitor reading captions as an interviewee speaks on the phone, and of both of us in person with our interviewees in various locations (ranging from hotel rooms, to offices at universities and libraries, to public outdoor spaces, to private homes). None of these videos will be made available for others’ viewing; we captured them for our own analytical use only.

### *Accessing Our Own Data*

Once data analysis began, we found ourselves working through another set of interdependent questions—how we would each access the data. We quickly noted that there is no such thing as an objectively “accessible” video, even if it is captioned and described (Kleege, 2016; Zdenek, 2015.) For example, Margaret’s video of a participant named Del, taken early in the process, did not include clear images of either her own or Del’s face, and thus was difficult for Stephanie to follow until a transcript was produced. (Note: Interviewees are identified by pseudonyms, some of which were chosen by interviewees themselves.) The addition of time

stamps to link specific points in the transcript to corresponding points in the video (made possible by our analytical software, Transana), makes conversations easier to follow, but not effortless. In analogous (but not identical) fashion, when Stephanie conducted a signed interview, Margaret had little access to it before it was roughly transcribed, a process that could take months; somewhat better access after it was transcribed; and good, though again, not effortless, access to it once time stamps were added.

Parsing these complexities together—as well as a thousand others, having to do with when interviews were transcribed, what sort of transcription we asked for (and did ourselves), how transcripts were finalized, how interviews were framed, how files were shared, how we kept records—made us realize just how difficult it is to practice interdependence in the moment, in concrete ways. As Mingus attests, it is *hard to stay together*. This study would have been a thousand times simpler if either of us had been conducting it alone, going through her own usual self-accommodation routine, and therefore less aware of the million assumptions and decisions she was making. But it also would not have resulted in the discoveries we’ve made about the crip potential of interdependent methodology.

### *Dimensions of Crip Methodology*

Before we worked together on this study, we had already been thinking about the three dimensions we expand upon here—[time](#), [gaze](#), and [emotion](#)—but we’ve acquired a new depth of knowledge about each one. These dimensions *reverberate* through our methodology—they make noise, they create a physical tremor, they can’t be ignored; sometimes they seem rhythmic and inviting, sometimes jarring and painful. By [sharing the stories](#) of how we came to recognize

these dimensions, and their significance, we hope to demonstrate some of the ways they matter to qualitative research.

## **Time**

*[Price and Kerschbaum]* During analysis of the approximately 41 hours of audio/video we’ve generated as well as the four additional interviews that were not videotaped, we noticed that *time* was consistently emerging as an important dimension of our interdependent approach. Disability-studies literature has shown increasing interest in the concept of “crip time,” mentioned in 1993 by Irving Zola and later elaborated by Alison Kafer (2013), Margaret Price (2011; 2015) and Ellen Samuels (2014). We are especially interested in the aspect of crip time that suggests not just its slowing down or speeding up along a linear scale, but its tendency to shape-shift. This section tells about various ways that our accessible approach to interviewing re-casts conventional time and demonstrates the ways that moving with others often crips interactional timing.

*[Price]* For over a year, I hoped to be able to travel to Miyoko to do an interview, but conflicting obligations for us both intervened, and the trip kept getting postponed. Finally, I asked Miyoko if Skype would be an acceptable alternative, and we set up a date to connect. On the day appointed, we both “arrived” on time and began to talk warmly and excitedly—but the digital connection wasn’t good. The video kept pixelating and freezing, so that Miyoko’s face was not clearly visible as she spoke. I started to get a little worried, and then extremely worried, as the problem continued minute after minute. I knew from past experience that if Stephanie didn’t have a clear picture of the interviewee’s face, it would be much harder for her to understand the words without a transcript. I felt caught in a conundrum: I could interrupt

Miyoko, who I knew was using considerable energy for the interview; or I could allow the interview to go on, which meant it would be inaccessible to Stephanie until a transcript could be generated. (Another "time" issue on my mind at that moment was that our transcripts were emerging, in some cases, very slowly, due to limited resources; thus, we could not count on this transcript being quickly available.)

Finally, I managed to break in and tell Miyoko, awkwardly, that the video quality was poor. We decided to ask her to shift the topic to how we might figure out a more accessible way. We decided to stop our interview temporarily while I checked in with Stephanie and while Miyoko moved to a different computer. In those (literally) heart-pounding moments, I got on my email, reached Stephanie, received her assurance that the video didn't have to be perfect—that it was okay to prioritize Miyoko's energy and capabilities in this instance—went back to a second video chat session with Miyoko, who had meanwhile switched machines, and completed the interview in somewhat improved, though not ideal, connective circumstances.

I'm struck by a number of things as I think more about that seemingly small moment that felt so big. One is its immediacy. Immediacy is a typical feature of a conventional face-to-face interview. However, additional time pressures exist for disabled researchers. Like our participants, we may be operating on a thin margin (of energy, resources, or options). Seemingly minor issues such as the chemicals present in a room, a high doorway threshold, or poor resolution on a video might make or break someone's access to the interview. I make this point not to suggest that disabled researchers are more burdened or debilitated than nondisabled researchers, but rather, for two generative reasons. First, I want to disrupt the normative assumption—an assumption that tends to prevail, if implicitly, in much DS research as well—that the researcher should be the *capable enabler* of a smooth and uninterrupted interview



experience (see Kerschbaum and Price, in progress). Second, I want to call attention to the fact that crip time is unpredictable; it speeds up and slows down, jumps, bends and twists. Crip time is, as Kafer (2013) has argued, “not just expanded but exploded” (p. 27; see also Dalke and Mullaney, 2014).

I want also to remark on the *difficulty* I experienced in breaking the conventional interview frame. Here’s a question that arises from a crip reading of qualitative interviewing: Why does so much qualitative-methodology literature give the [impression of emotional calm](#) on the part of the researcher? Despite my years of disability activism and scholarly work, despite everything I know about how access is enacted (it’s messy!), I still found it incredibly hard to interrupt Miyoko. I realize now that I felt as though I were struggling against all my qualitative-interview training which assumed that I, as the researcher, would have nearly unlimited access available to me, and that the participant must never be disturbed in any way to meet the researcher’s needs—in short, that the researcher(s) would never be disabled.

Finally, as I reflect on those minutes of quickly building stress, it feels important to mark that this was not simply an “access conflict.” Those of us who work in DS and disability activism are used to such moments; they are routine. Indeed, calling them “conflicts,” although that’s the term often used, may be a misnomer. Instead of setting our capabilities and needs against each other, saying that they “conflict,” we might instead imagine that collective access is still in play, is continuing to unfold (Mingus, 2010; see also McRuer, 2006, on the tendency of crip theory to “keep on turning”).

[Kerschbaum] As someone who studies everyday interaction, I’m acutely aware that timing is integral to many kinds of successful communication. Being able to participate in a conversation depends not only on knowing how to participate but also precisely when to make an

utterance, move one's body, make an interruption. But disability almost always changes the rules, and [not always in ways that make people comfortable](#).

When I interviewed Denise on the phone, for example, I used an internet-based captioning service that captioned for me what she was saying, and questions of timing pervaded the interview from the very start. After asking Denise if she can hear me, the very first thing I do is mention that I am using an internet captioning service, explaining, "so what happens with that is that sometimes if you're giving an answer or you're talking for some time it may take a little bit of time for the captions to catch up to ... what you're saying so I might pause for a little bit ... waiting for everything to show up on my screen." Denise responded to my explanation by confessing the possibility of a delay on her end: "just to let you know I'm going to try to eat lunch while we talk so I hope you don't mind I might have a little a delay too."

Throughout our conversation, the delays, the *timing* of the conversation threw me for a loop on a number of occasions, one of which led me to interrupt Denise and break entirely the frame of the interview. Just as she's about to describe a course she's teaching, I interject and say "okay ... um I'm gonna mention I think that the ... the captioner is having trouble keeping up with you um I'm guessing that you're talking fast I don't know ... are you a fast talker." I then explain that I'm seeing a lot of "speaker unclear" come up on the captions and suggest that not just timing—speed of speech—but also the captioner's familiarity with specialized terms or proper names that Denise might be mentioning could contribute to this.

Later in the interview, Denise makes a humorous comment about not liking how she sounds on the phone and then explains her choice not to mention her blindness during future phone interviews. At that point, I laugh. Reviewing the transcript, it was obvious to me that I was laughing at Denise's humorous comment, and not at her decision not to mention her blindness.

But the timing of the internet-captioning meant that as Denise continued to talk, the previous words she'd said were just then showing up on my screen. All of my reactions are delayed—they're not timed the way I would time them if I was getting what she was saying at the same time as she uttered them. While Denise and I ultimately had a fantastic conversation, throughout the interview, in many ways, even as we were moving in concert with one another, we were also bumping into one another a lot, getting the timing different.

[Price] It is not customary for qualitative literature to refer to any breaks in an interview, unless the interview is of unusual length (say, 4 or more hours). Yet our experience indicates that deliberately introducing a break into the interview scene brings benefits such as deepening reflection, allowing participants to resettle and get more comfortable, and perhaps remembering or returning to an idea that hadn't been fully explored earlier. Further, there is a deeper significance to the notion of assuming interviews should involve breaks. It positions *all* interlocutors as vulnerable, disrupting the assumption that the interviewer must be super-capable, "firing on all cylinders." It opens space for interdependence.

My email interview with Maya emerged out of mistaken timing: We had originally planned on an IM interview, but calculated the time change wrong and decided spontaneously to use email instead. Our entire email interview spanned months, with more than a month sometimes passing in between exchanges. In many cases, the breaks occurred because I was overwhelmed and didn't have the mental energy to read and respond to email. I inevitably began my delayed emails with apologies, but I slowly came to realize over the course of the conversation that my slowness wasn't a problem. Although I felt embarrassed not to conform to my own image of the super-capable researcher, efficiently "turning around" emails within a few days or even hours, the slowness actually seemed to enhance the depth and detail of Maya's

responses to my questions. I was able to think carefully about what she wrote, consult with Stephanie, carefully craft my follow-ups and probes, and take quiet time to reflect as my thoughts developed.

Then, after one round of follow-ups and responses, Maya didn’t respond for a very long time—five months. During this time, I sent a few “nudges,” couching them carefully so as not to apply uncomfortable pressure; for example, “I’m writing with another gentle query to ask whether this might be a good time ...” Eventually, I learned from Maya about a major life stressor that she had experienced. We took some more time off, and when our interview resumed, I found myself less nervous about allowing time to go by before I responded; the slowness was working for both of us. Because we were pacing the interview according to our own needs, rather than some external sense of when it “should” be finished, there was time not only for reflection and rest, but also for retreat. Eventually, we completed our follow-up conversations and the interview concluded—almost exactly a year after it began.

### **Gaze**

[Price] Eye contact, at least in Western and modernist contexts, conveys power and influence. For example, one study discovered that children are significantly influenced by cereal boxes whose drawn-on characters look directly into children’s eyes—which in turn means that those characters are drawn looking downward at an angle (to catch the gaze of presumably short kids roaming the cereal aisle) (Musicus, Tal & Wansink, 2015). The “power” association with a direct gaze is so strong that it has inspired whole books, not to mention an entry on the website “The Art of Manliness.” Furthermore, according to conventional Western scripts of etiquette, it’s just plain good manners to look others in the eye.

According to researchers who address eye contact as an aspect of interview methodology, it's a crucial means of establishing qualities including reliability, empathy, and responsiveness. For example, Janet Salmons's (2010) discussion of eye contact in video interviews is thoughtful, but replicates normative assumptions about the function that gaze is "supposed" to serve in interviews:

Eye contact is a natural part of face-to-face communication and considered by many people to be essential in building trusting relationships. ... The impression of failure to maintain eye contact is considered in many cultures to be a sign of deception and may lead to feelings of mistrust (Bekkering & Shim, 2006; Wegge, 2006). This is not merely a matter of the technology per se; user choices also influence perceptions. (p. 156)

We agree with Salmons's point that "user choices influence perceptions," and to some degree, we also agree that our choices during interactions must be governed by expected norms. (Sadly, it is not yet a viable option to attend interviews in pajamas, much as many of us might wish to.) But we also note that Salmons, like most writers who address the issue of gaze in interview space, seems to conflate what is *normatively* (in her term, "*naturally*") true with what *must* be true. In fact, there are many ways in which gaze might function in interview space, and our crippled methodology highlights not only the variety of options, but also our argument that these options will—in fact, *must*—emerge through the specific interaction of participant(s) and interviewer(s). They cannot be mandated ahead of time, nor can they necessarily be predicted.

Interestingly, gaze *has* been theorized with great care in several areas outside of qualitative research, including scholarship on reading and sign-language linguistics. Within reading scholarship exists an elaborate vocabulary for what it means to gaze upon texts, emerging from posthumanist and digital-humanities studies. As Mara Mills (2012) summarizes,

we can speak of “scanning, searching, linking, liking, clicking, selecting, cutting and pasting, navigating, sharing, skimming, looking, glancing, accessing, multitasking, mining, and pattern-recognizing. At a more abstract level, these techniques have suggested new interpretive modes: distracted, distant, shallow, surface, social, synthetic, collaborative, and hyper-reading.” Another example of careful analysis of gaze comes from sign-language linguistic studies (including both ASL and other sign languages). Researchers in this area have been noting the presence of eye gaze as a factor in grammar, turn-taking, and other aspects of language-in-interaction for decades (see, for instance, Baker, 1977). Building on Baker’s and others’ work, Deaf UK researchers Jennifer Coates and Rachel Sutton-Spence (2001) found that while eye gaze was important in the BSL interactions they observed, signed conversations do not always follow a one-at-a-time model; they may include significant overlaps and other ways of participating in a “collaborative floor” (p. 519). We propose that the significance of gaze persists into the realm of qualitative interviewing, and that researchers will benefit from exploring the many nuances therein. A similarly complex vocabulary can be developed, incorporating not only the various movements of “normative” (conventionally seeing) eyes, but also the work done through gaze when we are signing, when we are purposefully not looking at each other, and when the low-vision or blind eye is performing its own movements of perception.

*[Kerschbaum]* The different modalities in which Margaret and I have done interviews have attuned us both to differences in these means of communication. Gaze figures prominently—and differently—across these interviews for me. Indeed, in marked contrast to Margaret’s dispreference for eye contact, my need for eye contact brings me into an odd kind of intimacy with all of the people I interact with, as I stare intently at their mouths, their faces, their hands, and their bodily movements and positions as we interact.

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Dalia and I met to do an interview in an urban area. Neither of us had access to a private meeting space, so we first headed to a public library. After we got set up and started, however, a polite but firm librarian asked us to leave. We finally settled on doing our interview outside, on a bench shaded by some trees. Midway through the interview, I look down at the sheet on which I have printed our four central interview questions, and Dalia waves vigorously to get my attention again, to get me to look back up at her. Once I look up, she continues signing, but something that didn't quite fit the urgency with which she'd gotten my attention. After a moment, though, I realized that she'd gotten my attention not because she needed to say what she was saying, but because a police officer was walking by. After he passed, I embarrassedly admit, "I was checking that that was still recording," referring to the video camera, and she mentions the cop that had just walked by. I add, "I noticed, I was waiting" and she interjects, "that's why I kept signing I really have nothing to say but I wanted to keep moving my hands so he didn't interrupt us."

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Sometimes I wish I could be that person in the meeting who is sitting and looking at their computer but who still raises their hand to contribute because they are totally paying attention even if they're multitasking. I know, though, that if I look at my computer during a meeting, if I look away from whatever the central action is, if I am not paying attention to the interpreter, then it is completely obvious to others in the room that I'm not paying attention at that moment. Attentiveness, when communicating with a deaf person, is very visible, very apparently read off of the body. As Benjamin Bahan (2014) observes, "when comparing the eyes and the ears in communication—specifically in the sending and receiving of messages—eyes can send and

receive signals. The ears, however, can only receive signals, not send them” (p. 238). When people are listening with their ears, there are a number of ways they can signal that listening—and different kinds of listening may be performed in different ways. Listening with the eyes, however, means that what is being listened to can often be perceived off of the listener’s body.

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Looking away from the interview space is something I do often in lots of my interviews. It’s actually a bit of an eye comfort thing—at times I just need a tiny—even a fraction of a second—break from staring intently at the small area of someone’s face where their mouth is. Sometimes I look away not just to rest my eyes a tiny bit, but to take in something about my surroundings: What’s that noise? Did something just move over there? And, yes, embarrassingly, Is the camera still recording?

In fact, for me there is almost always a moment in an interview when I panic and worry that the video camera isn’t actually recording—that it’s malfunctioned or run out of battery or come unplugged or some other thing. I sometimes cringe when I watch my interviews again and see myself surreptitiously look over at the camera while someone is speaking. Usually this quick look doesn’t prevent me from following what someone is saying, especially if they are speaking orally and I’m speechreading them during the interview. But in both of my in-person interviews with deaf participants, the glance away from the interactional space totally disrupts the conversation: the person I am talking to stops signing and waits for me to look back again, and I feel rude for having looked away while they were mid-sign. Indeed, any break in the sustained eye contact that characterizes communication with a deaf person (see, for example, Burke, 2014) always interrupts the conversation.



Thinking about this, I later realize the proper etiquette (which is easy for me to forget because I spend so little time around other signing deaf people in my regular work life—as Mingus reminds us, it is easy to separate disabled people from one another) would probably have been to pause the interview and check the camera, rather than to try and do it surreptitiously. A signing deaf person talking to me is totally going to notice me looking away, no matter how quickly I do it.

*[Price]* I started knitting in professional situations sometime around 2006. That was when I learned, through painful experience, that I was never going to operate in academic space the way one is conventionally supposed to. It isn't possible for me to sit with other people for long periods of time without losing it, whether the space is a chilly fluorescent-lit hotel conference room, a sunny parlor with wooden bookcases, or even a soft chairless alternative like a cushion-filled studio. By "losing it" I mean losing my memory, coherence, ability to process aural information, ability to refrain from shredding the skin on my fingers, ability to walk comfortably the next day, or any combination of the above. (I am also realizing, as I attempt to list the costs of sitting in rooms, that there is a whole host of symptoms that don't fit neatly under the rubric of "ability"—for example, the ability not to develop eczema on my eyelids, or the ability not to develop muscle tics. One of the reasons I both love and am frustrated by my bodymind is the sheer weirdness it brings to my disability identity.) Anyway, I realized that I was going to have to figure out a way to inhabit these spaces without becoming so debilitated that I couldn't do my job. So I started bringing my knitting to meetings.

I started tentatively, in large meetings at Spelman College where we all faced the same direction (so I wasn't as noticeable), and working only on small, simple projects. Slowly I branched out to conference sessions and smaller meetings. Sometimes I was encouraged in my

endeavors, as when fellow conference-goers would say, "I wish I'd brought my knitting!" or colleagues would ask me to knit things for them or their children. Sometimes I was discouraged, as when a colleague asked me not to knit on a search committee, on the grounds that it might "make us look bad." (I don't necessarily disagree with that colleague—it would probably be disconcerting for a job candidate, in their vulnerable position, to encounter a knitting interviewer—but it's discouraging that the kairotic space of the job interview situation is so rigidly controlled that a relatively small change such as knitting could significantly affect the dynamic.)

Interestingly, the years during which I starting knitting in professional space are the same ones during which it became commonplace to use a laptop and/or handheld device in the same sorts of professional spaces. I experienced the shift toward use of digital devices in professional space as a positive one, because I was no longer the only person in the room with something (apparently) "distracting" in hand.

I can knit for long periods of time without looking at what I'm knitting, particularly if I've chosen a simple project, as I generally do for use in professional situations. (More than once, my pre-conference prep has involved casting on a pair of socks or a scarf so I'll have something small and easy to work on.) And I make a point of looking up from my knitting often, especially if I'm in a situation that I perceive to be suspicious of the knitting activity, or one in which eye contact simply seems desirable. I do this to signal, "I am paying attention to you"; that is, I do it entirely for the comfort of those around me. My personal preference when listening is to make little eye contact at all.

During my interview with Nicola, a working-class contingent faculty member with a chronic illness, she reported noticing after her diagnosis that she was making less eye contact,

and looking at peoples' faces less. After doing some research, she discovered that processing information on faces is cognitively demanding; after looking at someone's face for an hour or so, Nicola said, "I would literally have to go home and sleep." She continued, explaining that her conscious choice to limit eye contact in her workplace is "not to be rude, it's to be able to participate."

When I heard this, I experienced a startling sense of revelation; it simply had not occurred to me before that other people, except my neurodivergent compatriots (see, for example, Sibley, 2014), also experienced eye contact as exhausting. Like Stephanie in the moment of reviewing a sign interview, [I felt near tears](#) at the abrupt relief of a burden I hadn't quite realized I was carrying.

### **Emotion**

*[Price and Kerschbaum]* Neither of us is fond of the telephone. Although Margaret can aurally hear voices on the phone, she is unable to process the information without great effort, and experiences confusion, memory loss, and exhaustion during and after telephone conversations. In addition, her experience is unpredictable; depending on the day and contextual factors (such as how well she knows the other person), a phone conversation might range anywhere from a mild effort to impossible. Moreover, since she is not deaf, her inability to use the phone is frequently questioned; typical inquiries might be, "Just for five minutes?" or "Will you be able to use the phone next Tuesday?" (The truthful answers are "Depends" and "Depends.") Stephanie cannot understand spoken words on the phone without an interpreter or captioner, although she regularly schedules conference calls and teleconferences and then lines up accommodations (usually sign language interpreters), although even with these access moves, [collective access](#) on the phone is far from a guarantee.

Unsurprisingly, then, we enjoy *not* talking to each other on the phone. During our collaboration, we held extensive email and instant message (IM) conversations, and also communicated in other media—for instance, commenting on each other’s posts on our shared research blog. Along the way, we developed fine-grained knowledge of each other’s voices in IM environments—how to begin and end, what constituted an interruption, how to take turns, and how to signal emotion in non-verbal ways. We became sensitive to the different preferences we each have about managing IM conversation—preferences that are by no means generally used but which, because we communicated using IM so frequently, we understand about one another. Our ability to have these complex conversations together was developed, in a sense, as a literacy. No one taught us how to do this; on the contrary, we were both trained to operate in oral/aural settings and even though Stephanie does know sign language, she spends most of her time around people who don’t.

One of the first things Margaret commented on after reviewing the transcript of Stephanie’s interview with Zoe, which occurred over instant messaging, was the way that Stephanie “cued” Zoe in ways that were typical of our own IM conversations (for example, typing “nodding” or “listening” as a way of indicating that she was attending to Zoe’s words but not wanting to interrupt). While Stephanie began that interview drawing on her experiences chatting with Margaret, she ultimately found that she had to stop giving these cues after noticing that Zoe’s responses seemed to be distracted, rather than supported, by seeing these utterances pop up. This led Stephanie, in a subsequent IM interview with Zoe, to query about the ways that these sorts of paralinguistic cues (translated into linguistic form for the IM context) might be interpreted, explicitly typing into the chat window “(aside: I hope my paralinguistic cues aren’t

annoying/distracting—I do it because it feels important to signal that I’m here, listening, but let me know if you’d rather I stay more silent).”

When Margaret wrote a blog post about her first-pass analysis of Zoe’s interview, she noted the ways that the words both Zoe and Stephanie typed enacted emotion in specific ways—ways that might have been taken up, in a face-to-face interview, with gestures or facial expressions. For example, as Zoe told a story about discrimination at her school, Stephanie typed, “it makes me want to make a primal roar / HULK SMASH.” Of course, it might be extremely unusual to say this in a face-to-face interview setting; however, in this IM exchange, it was tonally congruent. Here, we see Stephanie making efforts to contextualize the IM environment, to actively perform the role of interviewer and not simply be a blank screen on which interviewees type their stories. In some ways, these IM moves could be interpreted as parallel to the facial expressions, background gasps, or mm-hmms or uh-huhs that both of us regularly perform during face-to-face interviews.

It is common to remark on the difficulty of managing tone in IM or email environments (see, for example, Kruger et al., 2005), but we suggest that this difficulty might be experienced more acutely by people who are not accustomed to conducting richly detailed conversations in such environments (which in turn might occur for a wide range of reasons, including, perhaps, preferences for using the telephone or comfort in face-to-face conversations). Because neither Stephanie nor Margaret can use the phone easily, we have developed a familiarity and ease in IM environments—one form of “disability gain” that has marked our movement through interviews. But this “gain” is not simple. Because our own abilities in synchronous digital space are often more developed than our interlocutors’ (this is also true when we converse online with journalists and some co-researchers), we have found ourselves serving simultaneously as

colleagues, coaches, and models when attempting to communicate in IM environments with others.

We are both highly attuned to the ways emotion plays out in these interfaces, due to our long experience in them. But we were taken by surprise by the ways emotion found its way into other elements of our methodology—even seemingly prosodic events like reserving a plane ticket, or proofreading a transcript. [When we set out to design an accessible interdependent study](#), we anticipated an exciting intellectual challenge, but neither of us anticipated it would feel so personal. But then access is always personal. Because access is always about someone’s bodymind.

*[Kerschbaum]* Doing this study has brought up a lot of emotional connections. When I collected data for my first major research study, I didn’t give a lot of thought to my own access needs, except in recognizing that I would need to hire people to transcribe audio and video data for me (Kerschbaum, 2014, pp. 22-23). In designing this study with Margaret, however, I came to realize many ways that [our own access needs make important innovations to our research methodology](#) (see also Kerschbaum and Price, in progress). That is, as we talked together about ways that we might design a study that is not only accessible to our participants, but to ourselves, we engaged in lots of collaborative discussions about the design of the study and what sort of data we might gather. In the course of those discussions, we agreed that recording video of the interview interactions would be an important means of building in access, as would be using high-quality video cameras that are able to record high-definition video—for me, this would help ensure that I could see people’s faces as clearly as possible and facilitate my ability to [connect specific utterances to specific places in the video footage](#).

But this attention to data gathering materials and products, however, has also led to some surprising realizations. I’ve been surprised to realize that when reviewing interviews where both participants are signing, I experience not only an accessible interview space for me—both for doing the interview and for the subsequent analysis—but also a deep affective response, one that [very nearly brings tears to my eyes](#). It is hard to explain this without coming across as sappy or maudlin, but I experience a strong feeling of exhilaration at being able to move through and within the video data and not be on edge, intently alert and focused on deciphering what is being said or done at any given moment.

Indeed, my concern and interest in being able to move smoothly through our video footage while knowing what is said at any given point was instrumental in motivating our purchase of analytic software ([Transana](#)), precisely because it enables us to use time-stamps to link the video with the place in the transcript associated with that point in the video. This affordance has been vital both for me to more quickly figure out what is being uttered orally *and* for enabling Margaret to be able to better follow what is being signed at a given point during the sign language interviews I have conducted.

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I know that I am not unique among researchers in feeling afraid and vulnerable at the outset of a project. But some of the specific questions I wonder about may be unique to me/my experience of disability. As Margaret and I have worked together designing this study, I have repeatedly drawn heavily on my knowledge about how I prefer to communicate, how I anticipate being understood, and how well I anticipate understanding others in a variety of contexts to determine what sorts of modalities might work best for any given interview. In some cases, I was motivated by ensuring that I could be understood; in other cases, I was guided by participants’ stated preferences and my willingness and ability to adapt to those preferences. Thinking about

the many factors that influenced these decisions, I find myself wondering about what it means to be “comfortable” in an interview environment? What kinds of interview environments should I try to create so as to enable interviewees’ comfort and access? How best to answer these questions when I don’t know the people I am interviewing? These were fraught questions for me, where I didn’t want to make a mistake or inadvertently annoy or offend someone or set off the sort of access alarm bells that echo in my brain whenever I sense that a particular environment or interaction might not be particularly accessible to me.

Here’s an example of what I mean. Margaret and I were successful in procuring a number of grant funds that enabled us to travel to conduct several interviews in person. Setting up these interviews involved a number of uncertainties that are complicated by our disabilities. For example, while I am fairly successful at speechreading in a relatively broad range of situations, I don’t always know how well I’ll understand someone, especially when I’ve never met them. For this reason, I just about always request interpreting in professional situations—even in situations where I know I might understand someone, many situational factors can influence my comprehension. For our interview study, however, the prospect of travelling across the country, at considerable expense of money, time, and energy, to conduct an interview with someone I didn’t know and with little knowledge of how the interview interaction might proceed, was daunting and frankly, emotionally scary and difficult for me. It’s even difficult for me to write this here, to share my vulnerabilities and fears around in-person communication access.

One perhaps obvious solution—to arrange interpreters for the interviews—actually produced a great deal of resistance in me. I know from experience that interpreters change the interactional dynamic, not always for the better (again, depending on the interpreter, the setting, the interpreter’s skill at matching my signing needs, my interlocutor’s familiarity and comfort



with interpreters, and many, many other factors). I also knew that I really wanted the interviews to feel like a conversation as much as possible. And frankly, I felt uncertain regarding how an interaction with an interpreter during an in-person interview would proceed, not to mention finding interpreters who are a good fit for my rather idiosyncratic signing skills in locations I was not familiar with.

[Price] As Stephanie points out, [many qualitative researchers bring a sense of vulnerability to their work](#), especially in intense situations like interviews. But what may be unique to each of us is the nature of that vulnerability, how it manifests, and the ways it interacts with our bodyminds, as well as the material circumstances of a given situation. In my case, my fears as I approach interview situations do not generally pertain to a specific modality; rather, they circulate around a sometimes confounding cluster of experiences having to do with mental distress, exhaustion, ability to make sense, and ability to *perform* "making sense."

What does it mean for me to "prepare" to do an interview? Even being able to articulate that emotional labor has taken me a long time, helped along by many conversations with Stephanie. In an effort to make this process more understandable, I'll compare it to another process I struggle with: leaving my house.

The act of leaving my house may seem, at first, to be primarily an issue of mobility. Can I fit through the doorways, can I descend the front steps, is there a means of conveyance that will take me to where I want to go? These sorts of physical barriers are of critical importance to many crips; for example, Tobin Siebers's (2008) *Disability Theory* describes his own house in minute detail, analyzing its architectural features and barriers (p. 85-88). In all these senses, I am the most privileged of crips—I *have* a house to leave, a private shelter; I stand and walk, and I can navigate most doorways and stairs. I can choose among walking, cycling, skating, or driving

after leaving my house. Even when my autoimmune disease has caused joint pain or fatigue, on most days my struggle to leave my house doesn’t have much to do with my limbs.

The struggle is located somewhere else, and is murkily identifiable through a feeling of negation and impossibility. It’s not like *not wanting* to do something; it’s more as if the possibility of doing that thing doesn’t exist in the first place. It’s an extraordinarily difficult struggle to describe, because language fails. At times when I can’t leave my house, my bodymind is operating on its own logic, a realm in which certain possibilities appear to be linguistically or ontologically foreclosed. Having also lived through the experience of being a queer kid before I knew that queerness existed, I can say that—for me—the two experiences carry a similar emotional charge: *Something is here, something is happening. But it is also nowhere*. It’s not unlike feeling crazy, a feeling that, in my experience, calls into question not what I am doing or feeling but the legitimate existence of that “I” in the first place.

I’ve developed this analogy at some length in an effort to explain the emotional process of preparing for an interview: the vulnerability I feel accompanies me like a fog, but can rarely be pinned down to any specific event that might occur. Managing that feeling requires enormous energy—regardless of the medium in which the interview takes place—and sometimes this uses up the energy I’d prefer to apply to other aspects of interviewing, such as thinking about how reliable the digital connection is, what my next follow-up question might be. Or, just as Stephanie related in an earlier section, [whether the camera is still recording](#).

Here I want to loop back to one of Stephanie’s questions: [“What does it mean to be ‘comfortable’ in an interview environment?”](#) Often, “comfort” is pitted against “accessibility” when situations of access are being negotiated. For example, a person using a wheelchair in a movie theater might *need* to use the accessible row of seats, and this might create a conflict with

non-wheelchair-users already occupying that row, on the grounds that those seats are more *comfortable* for them. But how is a distinction made between *need* and *want*, and how is that negotiation carried out? In a situation like the movie theater I've just described, the decision may seem fairly simple. (Ableist jerks should move over.) But collective access means constant negotiation of moments in which disabled people are trying to balance our capabilities and limitations together, and sometimes it seems there is no good way to move.

One common response to this ongoing complexity is to celebrate the creativity required to perform these ongoing negotiations and adaptations: as Neil Marcus (1997) famously said, "Disability is an art. It's an ingenious way to live." And I celebrate with him; indeed, I know that those negotiations and adaptations are not what we do in order to *get to* crip life together, but *are* crip life together (Mingus, 2010). Yet I also want to point out the enormous emotional energy required to keep doing that, all day, every day, all the time, with friends as well as foes. It's hard. It's tiring. It may affect different people differently in terms of costs. And it should be noticed. This emotional labor is not just part of our "personal" lives. [When disability is centered](#), and disabled people are working together to negotiate a complex process such as a study, it is also part of our work.

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