"The Light Duty Guy"
An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Discourse Surrounding
Workplace Accommodation and Disability Management in the
Canadian Mining and Construction Industry

By

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<u>Abstract</u>

This study utilizes the autoethnographic method of research to examine and reflect on the spoken language and labels associated with accommodated workers who have been disabled in workplace accidents in the Canadian mining and construction industry.

Spotlighting the personal impact and the implications of the "light duty" and "modified duty" labels as well as the slang terminology used to describe and characterize accommodated workers is an important first step in helping decrease the stigmatization of accommodated workers who have been disabled on the job.

As there is very little research in the field of the discourse rooted in workplace accommodation and disability management, it is my hope that this autoethnography will provide a voice that expresses the need to phase out prevailing negative attitudes and stereotypes surrounding accommodated workers, and amplify the call to tomorrow's mining leaders to support and actualize existing respectful workplace policies and human rights legislation.

Prologue: The Fall

I was working the midnight shift at a Canadian mine site. It was April of 1997 and winter had not yet let go. Through freezing rain and blowing snow, I made my way to the smelter with my crew. We were dressed in heavy leather jackets, hardhats, chaps, and personal protective gear that prevented our bodies from being burned while working on the molten metal units.

At the line-up meeting, my shift boss directed me to run scrap-metal for processing into the molten bath of a giant electric arc furnace. I went up top and discovered that the scrap-pipe's slide gate was jammed so I called the operator to help me loosen it. While I waited, I looked down at a dirty curved roof made of furnace firebrick and steel ten feet below. Ben arrived with the tools and we stepped onto the catwalk and began tackling the slide gate together. The sulphur dioxide in the air made our eyes burn. The gate would not move.

And then I fell.

It happened so fast that the details are a blur, but I remember slipping and I remember the sound of Ben shouting and I remember falling through the air. What I remember most of all is hitting the firebrick. I landed on the right hand side of my body. I heard my wrist snap and a heavy force rocked my ribs, hip, and knees. It was like being struck by a steel shark. I was stretched out on the roof and I could not move for a few seconds. Ben told me later that he thought I had been killed. I had the wind knocked out of me and I could not breathe. But then I felt my adrenalin kick in and I swallowed some air and rose to my feet. I somehow managed to scale the steelwork and, with Ben's help, made it back onto the catwalk.

My earmuffs were down and pressed tight against my face. The muffs had kept my hardhat from falling off of my head and I suspect that this may have saved my life. I had smashed my head so hard on impact that later it would be seen that the hardhat's liner left a halo-like bruise all the way around my skull. I was dizzy and weak, and I noticed my jeans were torn and my leg was cut. There was blood in my mouth and it tasted like copper and stone. My right hand was tingling and it felt like it had fallen asleep. My ears were ringing. Ben was talking, but none of his words were sticking because I was being pulled through a slow moving current of pain.

I remember the roof of an ambulance. I raised my right hand and it was so swollen that it looked like an inflated volleyball. My thumb was twitching. My knees and back were throbbing. I felt nauseous. As I was driven to the hospital, a paramedic asked me several questions about the accident and my injuries. I answered and watched her fill out a form on a clipboard.

At the hospital, I was x-rayed for broken bones and assessed for a concussion. The cuts on my leg did not require stitching. I was prescribed painkillers, and the doctor told me to try and stay off of my feet for at least a week. Before they brought me home, I was given a note for my employer stating that I was unfit for work. This was the first of many notes to come.

I got home, crawled into bed, and started having nightmares about falling through a cloud and being too afraid to scream.

Chapter I: Introduction

Canada produces over 60 metals and minerals including potash, uranium, aluminum, platinum, nickel, titanium, gold, and diamonds. All told, these natural riches generated 71 billion dollars in taxes and royalties paid to the provincial and federal governments between 2003 and 2012 (http://mining.ca/resources/mining-facts).

In 2015, the mining and mineral processing industry employed over 350,000 workers throughout Canada (http://mining.ca/resources/mining-facts). In addition, the mining industry often outsources work to construction companies that specialize in shaft deepening projects, open pit extensions, structural engineering, demolitions, major steelwork, and large-scale excavation. Together, mining and construction are known for being two of Canada's most perilous and risky occupations (http://www.hrmonline.ca/hr-news/most-dangerous-jobs-in-the-world-178186.aspx). Feyer et al. (2001) indicate that the mining and construction industry has one of the highest rates of "fatally injured persons by industry division" throughout the world (p. 24).

Between 2012 and 2014, the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada reported 88,742 lost time claims in the mining and construction industry alone (http://awcbc.org). The AWCBC defines a lost time claim as "a claim where an employee is compensated for a loss of wages following a work-related injury (or exposure to noxious substance), or receives compensation for a permanent disability with or without any time lost in his or her employment (for example, if an

employee is compensated for a loss of hearing resulting from excessive noise in the work place)" (http://awcbc.org).

The Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada does not track the percentage of lost time claims resulting in permanent impairments benefits by industry, but they do collect the data on the lost time claims and the permanent impairment benefits awarded to Canadian workers overall. Between 2012 and 2014, the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada reported 726,941 lost time injuries throughout all professions. Of those 726,941 lost time injuries, over 90,000 workers were awarded permanent impairment benefits (http://awcbc.org).

The AWCBC's national proportion of lost time claims awarded permanent impairment benefits would indicate that of the aforementioned 88,742 lost time claims in the mining and construction industry, there were at least 10,995 workers permanently disabled on the job in the Canadian mining and construction industry between 2012 and 2014 (See Table I).

TABLE I

The Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada
Proportion of Lost Time Claims for Canadian workers overall Awarded Permanent Impairment Benefits (2012 – 2014)
726,941 Lost Time Claims **90,000** Permanent Impairment Awards
726,941 X **12.39%** = 90,067
Proportion of Lost Time Claims for Canadian workers in mining and construction Awarded Permanent Impairment Benefits (2012 – 2014)
88,742 Lost Time Claims
10,995 Permanent Impairment Awards
88,742 X **12.39%** = 10,995

The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba assigns each of their employers to an "industry based on their business activities. Each industry is assigned to a risk category based on claim costs experience trends over a period of several years that reflect the level of risk associated with that industry" (https://www.wcb.mb.ca/commonly-used-terms#36). The Rate Risk Category for Mining is at 120%, Building Construction is at 200%, and Concrete Work is at 500% (https://www.wcb.mb.ca/industry-codes-and-new-business-rates). Given the High Rate Risk for these occupations in Manitoba, I can argue that there have been *more* than 10,995 workers permanently disabled on the job in the Canadian mining and construction industry between 2012 and 2014.

The Duty to Accommodate

When Canadian workers are disabled in workplace accidents, employers must meet the requirements of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, comply with Canadian human rights law, and fulfill their duty to accommodate by providing meaningful employment for the workers with disabilities (http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/psm-fpfm/ve/dee/dorf-eng.asp).

However, the Canadian Human Rights Commission explains "an employer or service provider can claim undue hardship when adjustments to a policy, practice, by-law, or building would cost too much" (http://chrc-ccdp.ca). Smaller companies can sidestep the duty to accommodate and release their injured workers to compensation boards for retraining. But mining multinationals and large construction companies cannot demonstrate that the cost of an accommodated role

will create an economic hardship or hamper its financial viability so the law binds them to the legislation. Therefore, mining multinationals and construction companies *must* provide meaningful work for the members of their workforce when they are disabled on the job. Mining multinationals and construction companies do not accommodate the disabled because they *want* to. Rather, they are *bound by law* to accommodate workers harmed on the job.

Meaningful Work

The duty to accommodate allows unions to bargain with mining corporations for joint return-to-work programs and policies post-disability for their members. As a result, workplace accommodations are often provided quickly and routinely. The Canadian compensation boards are focused on healthcare treatment, rehabilitation services, and preparing injured workers for a quick return to their workplace. Therefore, both the compensation boards and the unions approve of the workplace accommodation legislation.

The Canadian Human Rights Act states that the accommodated work provided must be *meaningful*, but the definition of the word *meaningful* is left open to corporate interpretation. The mining and construction companies determine and decide what is meaningful for their accommodated employees because they are providing the roles that they are paying them to fill.

It has been my experience that meaningful work entails a job search that focuses on low-ranking positions throughout the mining industry. The accommodated worker's tasks are often limited to cleaning washrooms, fire

extinguisher repairs, light bulb maintenance, and assisting training staff with general needs such as photocopying and working in the print shop, and there is very little opportunity for professional development.

Every aspect of mining is physically demanding. A great many of the workers, whether on surface or underground, specialize in manual labour. Mining and construction is a world where people work with their hands and bodies. As workers are constantly disabled on the job in high-risk industries, a barrier-free environment whereby accommodated workers have the opportunity to use their minds and become educated and productive members in their workplace seems logical. But multinationals can afford to pay "the light duty guys" to show up and do very little. When an employee with a disability is accommodated, he or she rarely has a say in their career development or career path.

Rather than creating value added roles and enhancing one's contributive capacity, mining companies create a subculture of employees with disabilities that simply fill time. Furthermore, accommodated roles are branded with the "light duty" label that enables management to discount and discredit the potential of the disabled members of their workforce throughout the remainder of their careers.

The Definition of Light Duty

Light duty is a term applied to workers who have been disabled in workplace accidents. The American with Disabilities Act defines light duty as "temporary or permanent work that is physically or mentally less demanding than normal job duties" (https://askjan.org/links/adaglossary.htm). The term light duty is a

negative marker that denotes one's incapacity to do what is normally expected on the job.

The Institute for Work and Health states, "Accommodated work is also known as modified work or light duties. It is work that has been adapted to the limitations of the worker's injury or illness. Examples are different job tasks, shorter hours, changed workstations or a different job" (https://www.iwh.on.ca).

The Job Accommodation Network states, "The term 'light duty' has a number of different meanings in the employment setting. Generally, 'light duty' refers to temporary or permanent work that is physically or mentally less demanding than normal job duties" (http://askjan.org/corner/vol03iss05.htm).

The Manitoba Federation of Labour featured light duty workers from several unnamed companies in a 2010 Claim Suppression report and stated:

Injured workers are told that there is always a light duty job for them to report to. Many times injured workers are put into positions such as hallway monitors, in which they simply sit in a chair in the hallway. In other instances injured workers are assigned to the lunchroom to cheer people up. Another example of meaningful work in this particular work place is to remind coworkers to wash their hands (http://mfl.ca/files/files/Claim-Supression-Final.pdf).

In the same report the MLA states, "There is great stigma and peer pressure surrounding those who go onto the light duties program"

(http://mfl.ca/files/files/Claim-Supression-Final.pdf). It has been my experience that the light duty label is the entranceway that authorizes and sanctions managers and supervisors to marginalize and stereotype workers with disabilities. White stated:

> Words, and the meanings with which they are imbued, can achieve accuracy and relevance or they can transmit dangerous stereotypes and half-truths. They can empower or disempower, humanize or objectify, engender compassion or elicit malignant fear and hatred. Words can inspire us or deflate us, comfort us or wound us. They can bring us together or render us enemies. Put simply, our lives are profoundly shaped by the words we apply to ourselves and those that come to us from others (http://www.naabt.org/documents/languagebillwhite.pdf).

Impairment-based language reflects a lack of expectation and it often determines how organizations value and respond to certain people.

Permanent Restrictions

After my accident, my right hand would never be the same again. The breaks just wouldn't heal. I required bone grafting from my hip to my wrist. I wore a cast from my elbow to the middle of my four fingers and the tip of my thumb for ten months in total.

After the bones finally healed and the cast came off, I was in physiotherapy for two years. In July of 2000, my orthopedic surgeon, my doctor, my physiotherapist, and a surgeon at the compensation board assessed my right wrist and thumb. The board established a 9% impairment rating with permanent restrictions. To ensure my safety and the safety of those around me in an industrial setting, my restrictions included no heavy manual labour, no lifting greater than 20 pounds, no heavy forceful gripping, no repetitive torsioning, no vibrating tools, and no hazardous equipment.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of my research is to explore the language associated with and applied to accommodated workers with permanent disabilities in the mining and construction industry. Analyzing the discourse is paramount, as it will allow us to understand, reveal, and unbolt the attitudinal constructs that frame and influence Canada's workplace accommodation culture and environment.

Research Questions

- How does the discourse surrounding workplace accommodation and disability management impact accommodated workers with disabilities?
- How does medical and impairment-based documentation impact the discourse of workplace accommodation pools in the mining and construction industry?
- How does the *light duty* label shape the accommodation narrative?

Brown (2010) stated, "Some stigmatized individuals question the norms about stigma and attempt to change the social environments for their peers" (p.186). The workplace accommodation model rests on a foundation of labelling and deficit-based language. This model must be reverse engineered before it can be upgraded, improved, and relocated to a better future.

Challenges

Initially, I had doubts about an autoethnography. Truth be told, I am still embarrassed about the way I was labelled and hearing the words "light duty" in any context always makes me cringe. When labourers and miners are disabled on the job, they are often too proud to speak up about the way they are treated afterwards. It doesn't play into what it is to be a miner, tough, strong, and in control. In the mining industry, admitting vulnerabilities and acknowledging that you are being stigmatized, implies a weakness or an admission that you can't look out for yourself.

While I am ready to talk about my experiences of disability and stigmatization, I respect that not everyone feels the same way I do. When we tell our stories, we often fear the impact our stories will have on the people we know (Ellis, 2007). I've opted to generalize the setting of the study and use pseudonyms for the participating parties. It has been my experience that the culture of mining towns and heavy industry is the same throughout Canada. And the "light duty" label is ubiquitous.

As an autoethnographer, I am going to write the way I speak rather than try and attempt to emulate the style and delivery of academics and professional scholars. I've spent my whole life in mining towns and over twenty years working in the mining industry, and I think that it is important for my words to read as such.

Chapter II: Literature Review

There is very little literature written on the topic of the spoken language and labels associated with accommodated workers in the Canadian mining and construction industry. There is even less literature on labelling and its contributive effect and shaping of a disability management subculture that hierarchizes the able-bodied over and above accommodated workers with disabilities told from the vantage grounds of a worker who was accommodated and labelled for several years.

In drawing attention to the labelling and the exclusionary constructs that are rooted in the accommodated workplace model and its impact on workers with disabilities in the Canadian mining industry, my autoethnography will focus on the Medical Model of Disability, Labelling and Stigma, Masculinity, and the Social Model of Disability. These fields of literature are the keystones that best support the arch and structure of my study and research, and set a stage for how my experiences as an accommodated worker shaped my identity and elevated my *understandings* of why people who have been disabled on the job are routinely labelled and devalued in heavy industry.

The Medical Model

The medical model of disability is widely known for objectively gauging disability as a clinical impairment or defect that has been caused by an injury or an illness. Furthermore, the medical model of disability utilizes a lens that compartmentalizes people with disabilities as damaged bodies or physical

defectives in need of treatment and repair before they can be returned to normal (Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000; Watermeyer, 2013).

Lightfoot (2015) illustrates that "the medical model of disability is the dominant twentieth and twenty-first century model for understanding disability among many professionals, and public perception of disability often reflects this model" (p. 447). As an accommodated worker in the Canadian mining industry for several years, I now recognize that the medical model's view of disability is commonplace in the field of heavy industry. Compensation boards administer permanent impairment awards to workers who have been disabled in workplace accidents after it is determined by a team of medical doctors that the worker cannot be *fixed* and put back in working order. In addition to a small cash sum, the impairment awards include a list of physical restrictions based on the opinions of medical professionals that not only objectify and reduce workers to beings beyond repair, but also limit the workers with disabilities to modified duty and light duty roles.

The medical model perpetuates a language of limitations and physical restrictions that act as guidelines for workers' physical capabilities. This medical language is communicated to let management know what a worker can no longer do, rather than what a worker can do. In heavy industry, these medical impairments, physical restrictions, and limitations in the workplace have come to *define* workers with disabilities. Consequently, accommodated workers are regularly identified as the *light duty guys* by the management teams in the mining and construction industry as well as members of the mining community.

Abberly (1998) states that the medical model of disability "locates the source of disability in the individual's supposed deficiency and her or his personal incapacities when compared to 'normal' people"(p.79). Workers in the mining industry are expected to fulfill their physical obligations and duties around the clock. Not unlike a machine, when a body is broken in a workplace accident and unable to meet the normal expectations of heavy industry, it is imperative that the human equipment be fixed and returned to the production line as soon as possible. Getting a worker *back to normal* so he or she can participate with the operating crew is critical to productivity. Due to the intense nature of the work, physical impairments prevent workers from getting the job done properly and on time (http://work.chron.com/job-skills-needed-miners-13454.html). When a permanent impairment award confirms that normalization is not possible post-injury by way of a medical professional's stamp of authorization and support, management often sees the worker as dysfunctional, deficient, and lacking in the power and resilience that is expected of dedicated employees to overcome and conquer a disabling injury and meet their job's physical objectives.

Disability is perceived as a problem within the individual that needs a *solution* so the individual with the disability can be *normal* again (Sullivan, 2011). Every single body has a physical purpose and the industry does not want to see a body that does not work properly benched on the sidelines. The system needs to keep the people working to their full physical and mental capacity and one and all must earn their pay. Without a solution or a cure, the accommodated worker is considered problematic and useless in a business and production context.

The literature indicates that the medical model of disability is entrenched in ableism. Campbell (2009) states, "that a chief feature of an ableist viewpoint is a belief that impairment or disability (irrespective of 'type') is inherently negative and should the opportunity present itself, be ameliorated, cured, or eliminated" (p. 5). Linton (2010) adds "ableism also includes the idea that a person's abilities or characteristics are determined by disability or that people with disabilities as a group are inferior to non-disabled people" (p. 223). When miners are permanently damaged in workplace accidents, their physical limitations and their failure to participate fully in meeting the organization's daily production targets are not in keeping with the mining culture's push for profit. Deloitte's global mining team released a report highlighting the challenges facing mining companies in 2016 and it indicated that there is tremendous pressure in the mining industry to reduce cost, enhance overall performance, and hold "people accountable for delivering specific productivity results" (https://www2.deloitte.com). This is a business construct that results in an exclusionary and discriminatory working environment, as the accommodated worker is not contributing to productivity and company earnings.

Siebers (2010) points to the way that ableism "occults in each case the fact that the disqualified identity is socially constructed, a mere convention, representing signs of incompetence, weakness, or inferiority as undeniable facts of nature" (p. 27). I noticed that many light duty workers accepted their place, tolerated the light duty label and the slang terminology, and just kept their heads down. They were paid for their role, labelled and oppressed, and blamed for their disability and there was not a lot they could do about it.

Wheatley (2010) asserts that the medical model of disability "constructs disability as a deficit or a pathology that requires correction or cure"(p. 64). Light duty workers are regarded as a burden and financial drain on the operation. I have heard managers refer to workers with disabilities as *write-offs* and *dead weight*. When someone is accommodated, an able-bodied member from another crew needs to be called in and paid time and a half to fill in for the disabled worker's vacancy in the operating field. When people are accommodated, not only are managers paying the accommodated workers a baseline rate, but also they are paying overtime for able-bodied people to fill in for the jobs the accommodated workers can no longer do. Eventually new employees will be hired to fill the positions on a permanent basis even though the accommodated employees are still tucked in the books. Like the "unsightly beggar" narrative in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, managers frown upon the workers who have been disabled on the job because they are recognized as a drain and a threat to productivity and the economic order (Schweik, 2009).

The unwillingness on the part of the industry itself to look beyond an outdated system whereby the disabled are marginalized and labeled as light duty workers has been brought on by a perception born of the light duty label itself that the disabled are of no benefit as they are now irreparably damaged and incapable of delivering on the hard work and heavy lifting that they were hired to do. According to the literature, there is a common misconception that the cause of the disability is the fault of the individual and his or her physical inabilities are often to blame (Ridolfo and Ward, 2013; Darling, 2013). Their disabilities have separated them

from the economic mainstream, and the accommodated are thought of as non-lucrative and defective, and uninterested in a full recovery. Lightfoot (2015) states, "In the medical model, disability is seen as a pathological individual attribute linked to incapacity and dependence" (p. 447). The workplace accommodation model actually sustains dependency for the accommodated. Workers with disabilities in the mining industry do not have a say in their futures. Accommodations are based on a take what you are given system that does not allow one to develop any real job skills. Without job skills that are versatile and marketable, and without training and education, the light duty workers are stuck where they are because they lack the qualifications that would help them be in the running for a better job or even a new career.

Galvin's (2005) study reveals that people with disabilities "reported that the negative attitudes of others greatly contributed to the development of negative self-perceptions" (p. 397). After it was established that I was of little use to the mining industry post-impairment, I became worried about the lack of opportunities elsewhere and I became dependent on my accommodated role. I lost confidence and believed for a time that an accommodated role in the mining industry would be the best job I would ever have.

What is interesting is that the literature repeatedly highlights the way the medical model of disability emphasizes the importance of normalization via treatment and rehabilitation. In the mining industry, an individual with a disability is expected to overcome his or her 'defects' and get back in the game. When this is

not possible, they are stigmatized via the light duty label and other slang terminology.

Labelling and Stigma

In looking at language and describing how labelling and slang terminology imparts signals and information to those around us, I discovered a considerable body of literature. Most notably, several theories relative to labelling and stigma indicate that the classifications and characterizations of difference are meant to establish boundaries and barricades between the ordinary and the unconventional as though this spoken and prejudicial separation will prevent *normal* people from being stained by a contagion of nonconformity (Link and Phelan, 2001; Shannon, 2007; Khan, 2012; Goffman, 1986). These theories will be explored and described, and used as a basis to reinforce my thesis and analysis of the discourse surrounding workplace accommodation and disability management in the Canadian mining and construction industry.

Clarke and Cochrane (1998) report, "How we name things affects how we behave towards them. The name, or label, carries with it expectations" (p. 23). The light duty label suggests that one's occupation is undemanding and therefore, unimportant and unhelpful in the context of heavy industry, production, and profits. Therefore, the light duty label enables those in charge to place workers with disabilities far afield of the natural order of business and disregard the management principles and practices that apply to able-bodied workers.

Link and Phelan (2001) explain, "Stigma exists when the following interrelated components converge. In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics—to negative stereotypes. In the third, labeled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of "us" from "them." In the fourth, labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes" (p. 367). In using the light duty label, it allows one to say, "This person is different from me. I do not share their characteristics nor do I share their limited capabilities." The label allows the labeler to feel superior to the point that the *light duty guy* is immediately downgraded and given lesser value and power. Accommodations are often solitary and away from the mainstream of production as accommodated workers are placed in print shops, storage closets, tool cribs, warehouses, and other isolated areas throughout the mine site. So the "us" and "them" separation is not only psychological and behavioural, but geographical as well.

Cusack et al. (2003) describe stigma as "some kind of mark, attribute or characteristic of an individual or group that is regarded by others as flawed, deviant, or inferior. For many individuals, these stigmas engulf others' impressions of them, such that it can become difficult for others to see beyond a stigma, e.g. seeing a disabled person solely in terms of their disability. In this sense, a stigma often plays the role of so-called 'master-status trait' since it is assumed to be central to the identity of the individual and becomes their perceived defining feature"(p. 295). The light duty label intimidates and degrades people. The label delivers a psychological

hit to a worker's self-esteem. The words indicate that there is something about you that is preventing you from being an equal member of the industrial society. What is more, the label instantly banishes one to a lesser station. It is as though a hierarchy is reminding the employee that he or she does not quite measure up to the traditional business standard.

Discourse analysis is a way of understanding the deeper meaning of the language we use (Yates, 2011). When we take the time to consider how language is placed together and positioned, we can start to understand the context, the beliefs, and possibly, the biases of the speaker. People are openly labeled via their physical differences in an industrial setting. The *guy in the cast*, the *guy with the cane*, the *guy with one leg*, the *guy with one eye*, and it is debasing. The literature demonstrates that labels strip people of their identities and reshape their uniqueness into something of a social barrier. Labeling lays the foundation for a kind of divisive discourse that increases the separation and exclusion of those with disabilities.

Shannon (2007) states, "The most important aspect of stigma is the effect that it has on its targeted individuals and groups (such as those with disabilities). Persons who are stigmatized are faced with invasive and never-ending reminders of their inferior positions within Canadian society" (p. 41). Language is a powerful tool for identifying our unique place in the world. We use labels to tell people who we are, wife, mother, daughter, sister, brother, miner, professional dancer, labourer, lawyer. Language tells the world something about who we think we are and we carry the strength of our own characterizations and identities.

Shannon (2007) adds:

Awareness of the stigmatizing labels and associated negative attributes

attached to them inevitably comes to have a serious effect on the self-

perception of persons with disabilities. Many eventually come to believe (…)

in their own position as 'outsiders' living precariously on the margins of

mainstream society. It is this lack of self-confidence in their own persons as

integrated, autonomous, and dignified selves that colours all aspects of their

social relations with others and frustrates the possibility of broad and

meaningful change (p. 42).

It has been a long time since I was an accommodated employee but to this day,

whenever I meet someone new and they ask me what I do, there is this fear that

someone from my past will appear out of the shadows and exclaim, "He's a light

duty guy!"

There is a scene in the movie *An Officer and A Gentleman* where a drill

sergeant is trying to wear down a naval officer candidate (Hackford, 1982). The drill

sergeant is tough and unforgiving and he wants the candidate to quit and leave the

academy. The drill sergeant believes that the candidate does not have what it takes

to be an official part of the team. The candidate, played by Richard Gere, finally

breaks apart and shouts, "I got nowhere else to go! I got nowhere else to go. I got

nothin' else." The scene captures what it feels like to be an accommodated worker.

My hand did not work the way it was supposed to. I did not have any schooling. I

had made a living with my hands and for the first time in my life, I felt like I had

nothing to offer the world. I was just a light duty guy. I believed, for a time, that I had

nowhere else to go. And I believed, for a time, that I had nothing else beyond an accommodated role at a mining company. As part of the same continuum, role-theory illustrates that one's role and one's status exhibits a particular set of characteristics inherent to that role, and there are expectations associated with that role in factories and business (Biddle, 1979; Biddle, 1986). The light duty label is an industrialized marker that both weakens and undermines workers with disabilities. Lucas and Phelan (2012) point to the way "research finds that individuals tend to expect less competent performances from physically disabled than from non-disabled persons…and general performance expectations favour the physically abled relative to the disabled"(p. 315). The label has negative connotations in heavy industry, most notably the word *light*. It is the opposite of *heavy* and in an industry that values physical size and weight and a solid effort at shift's end, the word *light* implies frailty and a small and limited amount of energy.

When you have been labelled, it gives the people around you a green light to *other* you. Khan (2012) writes:

Othering is the process through which a dominant group defines into existence a subordinate group. This is done through the invention of categories and labels, and ideas about what characterizes people belonging to these categories. The literature defines 'othering' as what happens when a person, group or category is treated as an 'object' by another group. This 'objectification' allows actors to break the moral rules of social relationships (p.12).

When workers are disabled in workplace accidents and assigned to workplace accommodation pools, othering is a standard practice. Not only are the workers with disabilities labeled as accommodated workers, light duty workers, and subjected to other slang terminology, but they are marginalized via their new duties and responsibilities as well. Their tasks are often menial and unchallenging, and the work is infrequent and solitary. Accommodations and othering are often inseparable in that the accommodated duties are exclusionary and tend to move workers with disabilities away from the mainstream. The separation of the worker with a disability from the collective workforce reinforces the othering and the labelling as they are no longer a part of the working crew.

Link and Phelan (2001) add, "stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination" (p. 367). The workplace accommodation system is rife with labelling and inequity. There are obvious disparities between the accommodated and the able bodied in the ways they are evaluated, treated, and respected by everyone around them.

Hughes (1998) explains "the notion of disability as carrying a stigma and being associated with some curse or wickedness is not confined to cultures in the distant past" (p. 56). In present-day mining and construction, coworkers stigmatize disabled workers because it reminds them of their own vulnerabilities. The realization that a disabling injury can happen to anyone is a lot to bear when your

livelihood depends on your body staying strong. In *Stigma: Notes On The Management of Spoiled Identity,* Goffman (1986) featured the word "normals" to describe those who have not been stigmatized by "abominations of the body – the various physical deformities"(p. 5). Goffman (1986) then adds, "We believe the person with a stigma is not quite human (…) we construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents" (p. 6). I remember limping into work with my crew after bone was harvested from my hip to my wrist. My crew said their hellos and asked when I would be ready to come back to work. They moved quickly as they spoke and I could not keep up with them, and then I was left behind. I have since learned that the fear of a disabling injury is a secret mark of shame and a *curse* for the hard rock miners and heavy hitters.

Masculinity

The literature shows that industrialization created an economic shift whereby the bodies of working-class men were utilized to build railways, drill oil wells, and tend to rapid-fire assembly lines and the production of consumer goods in mass numbers. Able-bodied, tough workers were economically exploited by way of their physical strength and willingness to perform manual labour. Pay and physical status merged to create an industrial world and a culture that turned the spotlight on masculinity, physical dominance, and an ability to contribute to progress and the economy. Men have embraced this industrial framework and it is common for workers to proudly showcase their strong backs and strong hands and *guts* on the job. Working-class men fortify their identities and manhood in displays

of toughness, bravado, and risk-taking in their roles. Muscular capital is a resource that uneducated men can tap into to make a good living and provide for their families (Baron, 2006; Richmond-Abbott, 1983).

Throughout the years, I have noticed that mining and construction employs a large number of athletes, especially hockey players. Hockey Canada reports that hockey players have a 1 in 4000 shot at playing for a team in the National Hockey League (http://www.hockeycanada.ca/en-ca/news/2003-gn-001-en). Given the odds of playing professionally, the mines are filled with men that did not quite make the cut. In pursuing their dream, education often takes a back seat to their athleticism and sportsmanship. But as the dream fades, athletes turn to the mines. In 2013, mining and construction were the best paying jobs in Canada, that did not require a degree with an average salary of 93,320.00 a year (http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/07/04/best-paying-jobs-no-degree-canada_n_3546635.html).

Physicality and athleticism are the key components the mining and construction industries are seeking for their workforce. A sporting history demonstrates that one has the strength, stamina and agility to put in a solid shift for the company. Hockey is known for being a rough and tumble sport and it takes balls to play the game. These are characteristics ideally suited for production and profit in mining and construction so recruiters tend to seek out athletes at the ends of their careers.

Farnsworth and Sewell's (2012) findings suggest that one's understandings of emotions are brought about by locality and culture, and its accompanying

stereotypes and values. In the mining and construction culture, workers are expected to keep their softer sides concealed. The ideal miner is strong and tough and has a solid handle on self-command. Farnsworth and Sewell (2012) state, "Western culture may view emotion as reflecting utter chaos…with such frightening qualities implicitly or explicitly ascribed to emotion, it is little wonder that individuals in Western culture may develop a wariness or outright fear of exploring or understanding their own or others' emotional experiences" (p. 257). Farnsworth and Sewell's (2012) research points to something called 'emotion-threat' and they explain that this is a mindset whereby one's emotions may possibly clash with the self, so it is imperative for the Westerner to react immediately and keep the threat at bay. This reaction shields one from the unexplored, keeps emotions intact, and establishes the control needed to preserve one's "self-identity" and "place in the world" (p. 258).

Jakupcak et al. (2005) indicate that there are correlations between "masculinity, fear of emotions, and proneness to shame and external expression of anger" in an analysis that confirms, "men's fear of emotions emerged as a significant predictor of overt hostility, anger expression, and diminished anger control" (p. 281).

Accommodated workers remind hard rocks of their vulnerabilities so the accommodated are frequently labelled and rejected. Baron (2006) states, "A pervasive theme in histories of working-class masculinity (and masculinity studies generally) is how men have confronted threats to their manhood" (p. 144). This need for othering the accommodated enables the able-bodied to separate

themselves from the threatening reminder that they too could become disabled at any moment. Detachment is often one's modus operandi to temporarily bury fears and anxiety, and continue on with the business at hand.

In *Young Men and Masculinities*, Seidler (2006) explores men's behaviours and their self-definitions in the context of love, culture, fatherhood, and theatres of war. His findings reveal vulnerability at their core and a drive to rid themselves of this fear of weakness and social-status drop. Seidler (2006) states:

> The fear of 'losing face' resonates for men across diverse cultures. In the West it goes along with a sense that masculinities can never be taken for granted, but must be affirmed even at the cost of putting others down. The way dominant masculinities are constructed often means that men can only feel good about themselves at the expense of others (p. 203).

Labelling and othering may be a way for men to relieve themselves of the potential for empathy and connection with workers who have been disabled on the job.

Stevenson (2008) states, "Men with disabilities can experience marginalization, exclusion, and oppression due to their perceived inability to be *real men*" (p. 14). Accommodated workers are often relegated to the dungeons of the mining hierarchy. A disabling injury reflects a failing on the part of the worker as he is expected to recover and get back on the job.

Masculinity is often reinforced and heightened by popular culture in the mining industry. In the movie *Platoon*, a young soldier has been wounded in battle and he is screaming in agony (Stone, 1986). The sergeant covers the soldier's mouth and tells him to "Shut up and take the pain. Take the pain!" When a worker is hurt on the job in the mining and construction industry it is not uncommon for members of the crew to imitate the sergeant in *Platoon* and encourage their injured co-worker to "Shake it off and take the pain!" When injured workers fail to "shake it off and take the pain" they are ostracized and blamed for their inability to recover.

Wheatley's (2010) analysis of Goffman spotlights how "the 'disgrace' that attaches itself to a stigma is more powerful than the bodily evidence that gives rise to the stigma. In other words, the disgrace constructs the disability"(p. 68). The shame that is associated with being assigned to an accommodated and light duty role is disempowering and destabilizing in that a worker with a disability is suddenly dismissed to the lowest levels of the mining and construction chain of being. Because nothing is said about being left behind and forgotten, and few would listen if something were said, the labeling that occurs in the mining and construction industries has become entrenched in the workplace accommodation model.

Nielsen's (2015) research reveals that heavy industry employees "describe the prevailing workplace culture as masculine and hierarchical. People working within the sectors consider themselves staunch, stoic, and strong"(p. 17). It follows that workers disabled on the job may be too proud to speak up about the way they are treated after they have been disabled on the job because it does not play into what it is to be a hard worker, tough and in control.

The literature suggests that masculinity is comprised of a system of requirements that include self-sufficiency, fearlessness, and a *tough as nails* approach to the world. But most importantly, true masculinity masks one's feminine side (Brown, 2012). If a hard rock is experiencing vulnerabilities and emotions, they are not disclosed for fear that the hard rock will lose face and be perceived as soft and gutless.

Gerschick's (2005) interview with a roughneck from an oil-rig reveals a powerful link between masculinity and physicality. Given the job's intensity and potential for danger, the oil-rigs are not for the timid nor the faint of heart. There is a demand for toughness and durability and an expectation for the roughneck to tolerate pressure. The body takes a beating and, as the miners say, *you just have to keep powering through it 'til the job is done*. During Gerschick's (2005) interview, the roughneck:

Described the sense of accomplishment he experienced from earning his place in this particular men's club. By working at breakneck and dangerous speeds and surviving the constant challenges to his masculinity, he proved himself a man while simultaneously enriching his employer. In this latter way, his body and the bodies of men like him can be understood as instrumental commodities to be sacrificed to capitalism (p. 375).

In heavy industry, a working man's scars are a testament to *taking the pain* and *powering through it*. They are like flesh-coloured medals indicating that you are worth your keep, you have fought the good fight, and you are ready for more.

The Social Model

The social model of disability pulls the camera back and away from the medical model's limited view of impairments and defects to expose social and attitudinal obstacles, cultural oppression, and the systemic barriers that are holding people in place. The social model depathologizes disability to recognize the value of diversity and uniqueness and the need to do away with the disadvantages that have been instituted and established by the guards and gatekeepers of old. The social model acknowledges and advocates the value in choice, control, and self-determination for one and all (Albert, 2004; Shakespeare 2010; Goering, 2010; Darling, 2013).

Goering (2010) looks at the social model to "redirect our attention to how societal attitudes, practices, and institutions may disable individuals unnecessarily and unjustly, and to call for social change that will allow for greater inclusion of people with impairments and recognition of their value" (p. 54). The social model of disability has the potential to broaden the mining world's scope. Rather than dissuade workers with disabilities from participating to their full potential and allowing attitudinal barriers to hold people back, the social model seeks out a foothold for movement and progress allowing organizations to become more inclusive and evolve for the better.

Scullion (2009) offers a route away from the medical model toward the social model when stating:

Disability is taken out of the private medical arena and placed in public and political spheres, given prominence to the notions of rights and equality. In this paradigm, disability is not caused by individuals' impairments; rather, it implicates collective thinking and actions that exclude, oppress and devalue disabled people and has been characterized as a barriers model. Barriers may be physical, educational, economic or attitudinal (p. 701).

A social model approach would improve the current situation for miners with disabilities by acknowledging that disabling injuries on the job happen in high-risk industries and disability should not be vilified. What should be vilified is the way that disability is perceived. The light duty label and the slang terminology play into an attitudinal barrier that prevents workers with disabilities from experiencing a sense of belonging and job satisfaction.

Jivraj and Ignagni (2015) provide a backdrop for the attitude in mining and construction toward accommodated workers in stating, "Industrial capitalism's profound influence on the fabric of social and economic life created *the conditions under which impairments were socially produced*. New industrial disciplinary regimes led to a new emphasis on individual productivity, efficiency, and effort, in turn producing new forms of exclusion" (p. 453). The social model emphasizes the value in self-determination and exposes the shortfall in not recognizing an

employee's ability to contribute beyond a physical level. As it stands, if your body is not doing what a good labourer's body should, you are marginalized, excluded from team activities, and pushed into the cracks.

From a business perspective, drawing attention to the inhibiting labels that are applied to workers with disabilities in the mining and construction industry is twofold. It is a necessary pivot towards dissuading and preventing ableism, and establishing an environment whereby one is no longer devalued and portrayed as dependent. Secondly, when disparaging labels and attitudinal barriers are cleared away, the clearing may reveal that accommodated workers with disabilities are untapped resources that have the potential to add value to the industry.

In the Canadian mining industry, the workplace accommodation model plays a large role in the way that people with disabilities are perceived. Ridolfo and Ward (2013) point to a deeper perspective in stating, "Compared to medical models of disability, the social model of disability broadens our understanding of how disability is socially constructed" (p. 17). In keeping with the literature, the social model re-educates and enlightens people to the reality that accepting people with disabilities and listening to what they have to say is good and just. Albert (2004) adds that the social model "is so powerful because it illuminates the fact that the roots of poverty and powerlessness do not reside in biology but in society (...) a human rights approach offers both the platform for such societal transformation and a way for disabled people to transform their sense of who they are " (p. 4). In light of the literature regarding the social model, helping rid heavy industry of the

light duty label and slang terminology is a strong first step in promoting respect and dignity for workers with disabilities.

When everyone is given a chance to get in the game and help enhance profitability, talent is no longer passed by, people are less likely to be stigmatized as it allows everyone to be a part of the team and do his or her best work, and collectively, the entire workforce can recognize the importance and value of inclusion and diversity.

Summary

The literature has helped me see a blueprint beneath the labelling and devaluation of people who have been disabled on the job in heavy industry. It is a blueprint that not only imparts an intersectional approach to labelling workers with disabilities through the literature itself, but a blueprint that offers deeper insight into labelling's core expression as well as its origin and influence (See Illustration I).

The medical model designates disability as a physical defect that needs to be fixed and corrected. When the defect is irreparable, the physical restrictions and accommodated duties assigned to the person come to define the worker in heavy industry. It follows that accommodated workers are then referred to as *light duty guys*. The *light duty* label also communicates a spoken buffer that pushes, separates, and distances the workers with disabilities away and apart from the able-bodied.

In mining and construction, I cannot say *everyone*, but some people, for one reason or another, are afraid. The owners are afraid that they will lose money. The

board-directors are afraid of stock market forces that will make the company's share prices drop. The executive team is afraid of missing the net on quarterly profit goals. The managers are afraid that they will fall short on their production targets or there will be a lost time accident. And the *hard rocks* and *heavy hitters* are afraid of being killed or disabled on the job.

Brené Brown (2012), a researcher specializing in vulnerability and shame, reveals that men are under tremendous pressure not to be seen as weak or soft. When men distance themselves from a particular group, the distancing and detachment is an attempt to take control and regain power over something that makes them feel uneasy and afraid. Fear is something to be ashamed of so distance is key.

In mining and construction, fears are oftentimes unexpressed. But the shame associated with being afraid of share prices dropping, poor quarterly earnings, missed production targets, and disabling injuries manifests itself in labelling, stigmatization, and slang terminology. At its core, scapegoating workers with disabilities is a cure-all and a release for the shame of unspoken fears in heavy industry. And the scapegoats mirror this cycle of fear and shame and anger (See Illustration II).
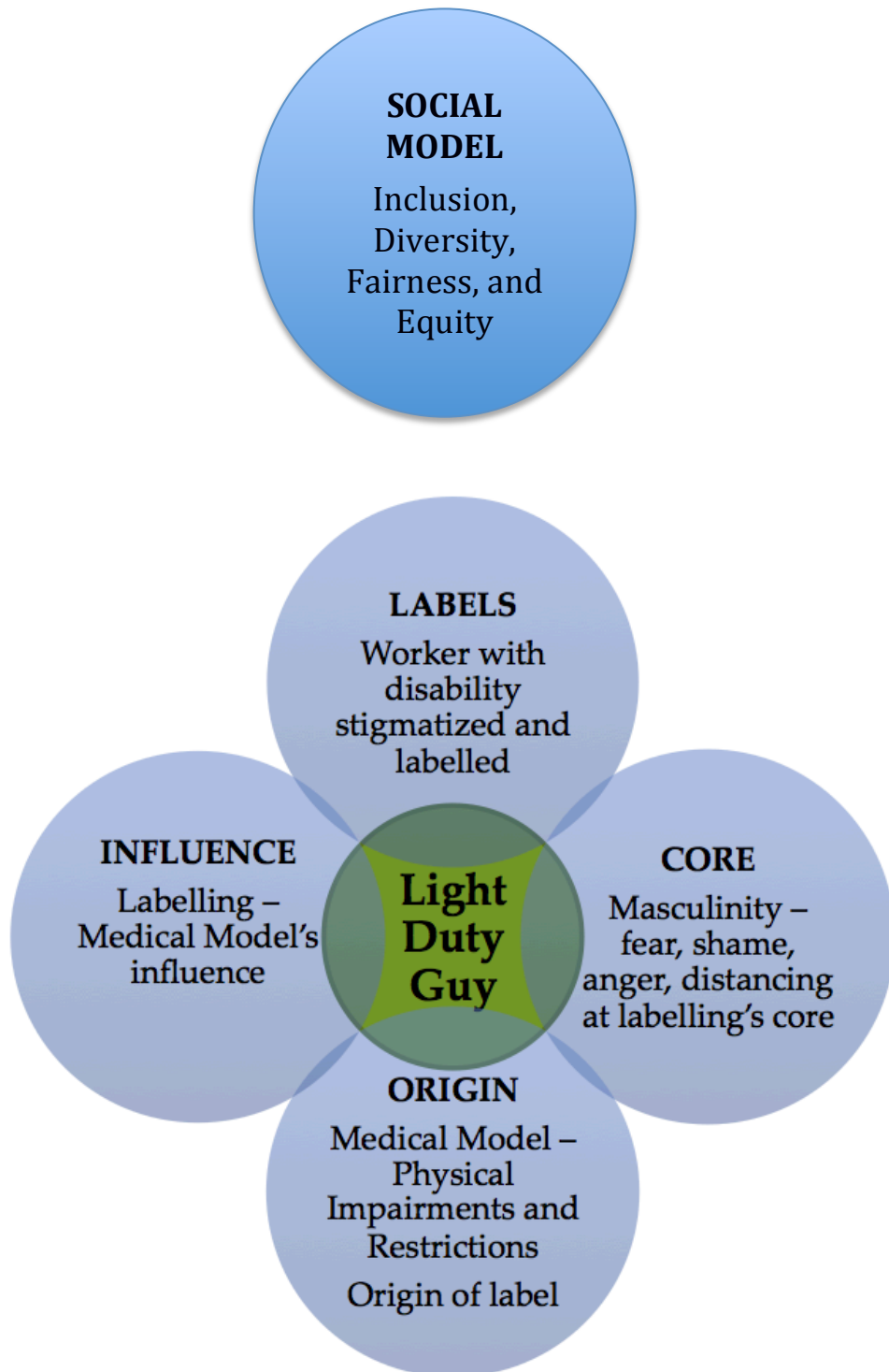
In the context of heavy industry and labelling, there is a line from the movie *Greenberg* (Baumbach, 2010) that keeps coming to mind - "Hurt people hurt people." But looking ahead, the social model of disability gives me a strong sense of hope. Galvin (2005) states, " the disabling of identity can be understood, not as a

personal tragedy or an inevitable consequence of physical loss, but as a socially

mediated phenomenon which can be challenged and changed" (p. 409).

Labelling and slang terminology is a cultural construct in mining and

construction. Scullion (2009) states, "a move towards the social model would

release some of its potential to challenge discriminatory thinking" (p. 704). This

approach will, in all likelihood, facilitate positive developments that embrace

inclusion and help rid negative ideologies and behaviours for the next generation.

Origin and Influence (Light Duty Label)
Illustration I

SOCIAL
MODEL

Inclusion,
Diversity,
Fairness, and
Equity

LABELS

Worker with
disability
stigmatized and
labelled

INFLUENCE

Labelling –
Medical Model's
influence

Light
Duty
Guy

CORE

Masculinity –
fear, shame,
anger, distancing
at labelling's core

ORIGIN

Medical Model –
Physical
Impairments and
Restrictions

Origin of label

Masculinity - Emotional Framework
(The Labellers and the Labelled Mirror One Another)
Illustration II

Chapter III: Methodology

In the summer of 1987, I worked as an expediter for a gold mine in Sherridon, Manitoba. The two things I remember most about working in Sherridon is that I met incredible people from all over the world and every one of them had a story to tell. The second thing I remember is that I made more money than I had ever seen. After summer ended, I was hooked on the blue-collar lifestyle. In the years that followed, I worked as a labourer for several different construction companies. I helped build things like thickener tanks, roasters, residue pits, hydroelectric dams, and electric arc furnaces. This experience led to jobs in gold, zinc, nickel, and copper mining. I made a good living with my hands and I liked knowing that whenever I needed a change, I could put my body to use somewhere new. But then one night on a graveyard shift I was damaged in a fall and the freedom and opportunities that banked on my manual labour were suddenly washed away.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that bridges the personal with the cultural by way of shared experiences and creative storytelling. In order for readers to fully understand and make sense of a culture, it is necessary to hear a voice that is coming from the heart of the culture itself. Autoethnographers often extend their voices through journaling, poetry, and cinematic reference points to promote accessibility, receptiveness, and understanding, and lean towards words that are raw and real and true to the experience of having been a part of the world they wish to share. It is challenging to trust oneself enough to not only get to, but also accept the truth of one's exploration and discovery. It is a journey into the

unknown, a journey of identity, heartfelt expression, and new perspectives. So the sharing tends to be emotionally charged and alive with textures, senses, reflections, and memories (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013; Pelias, 2013; Mingé, 2013).

I have chosen autoethnography as my research methodology because I believe that is important to provide an insider's account of my experience as an accommodated worker. A personal narrative will best communicate what it is to be reduced to three words *light duty guy* and help make sense of the phenomena of labelling in heavy industry. Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013) state:

Autoethnographers work to connect with multiple and diffuse audiences by writing and performing in clear, concise and engaging ways. They strive for an expanded audience by using the tools of literary and aesthetic (visual art, dance, film, performance and multimedia projects) practitioners. They appreciate storytelling as a way of knowing, sharing, and relating, and value a variety of representational mediums (e.g., performance, writing, film) and genres (...) not only do these practices make research more accessible and, we believe, more valuable in that more than just a select few can engage particular works, but they also help satisfy some autoethnographers' commitment to cultural critique and social justice (p. 37).

I am experiencing a duality of sorts as I write. The voices from the mine are amplified by memory and time. They are booming and heated. Years ago, I spoke out about light duty labelling and its impact on accommodated workers in an industrial

safety meeting and my concerns were met with amusement. A manager said, "Labels? Jesus, Mitchell. There are people all over the world who'd welcome a label for the amount of money the light duty guys get. I mean, look around. They're doing next to nothing. Over a dozen poor bastards a day are killed in China's coalmines, and you want me to feel bad for our accommodated workers because they can't handle being needled once in a while?"

But there is another voice too. A voice that is calm and clear. I questioned whether my objections to labels and slang terminology were really that important in the face of all the terrible things that were happening in the world during a classroom discussion at school. And my professor answered, "Yes. It is important. It's about injustice, Terry. And this is what's happening in your part of the world. If you don't say something about it, then who will?"

I realized that workers with disabilities should not have to stomach ableism, stigmatization, and labelling solely because they have it better than those less privileged and less fortunate. International comparisons should not bring equality and fairness to a standstill nor should they diminish or discourage one's push for human rights. It was necessary to share my experiences and try to help in some way instead of keeping quiet and hoping things would just change on their own. As Canadians, we need to keep raising the bar on human rights because we are the bar for most of the world.

An autoethnography communicates social and cultural matters that are shaped by our personal experiences and observations (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011). I am drawn to this approach because an autoethnography provides a narrative that

has the capacity for reflection and dialogue. I echo Wall's (2006) position that "the potential power of autoethnography to address unanswered questions and include the new and unique ideas of the researcher is inspiring to me" (p. 4).

Wall (2006) explains that the autoethnographical model makes use of the researcher's familiarity and awareness with the subject area thereby revealing a more complete approach to presenting information and experiences. Wall (2006) suggests that traditionalists have a preference for scientific data and objectivity as it gives them full control over the subject matter. The traditionalists want to be perceived as experts who know what is best for the groups that they have studied. However, their quantitative method draws conclusions that are restricted and exclusionary. The autoethnographical model is paramount in achieving equality for people with disabilities as it provides a voice that rises above marginalization and oppression and cuts through exclusionary research methods. An inclusive and unrestricted dialogue is essential to a thoroughness and reliability of research that will connect with people going through the same kind of experiences. Autoethnographic research comes *from* people with disabilities *for* people with disabilities. This creates a power shift that influences collective discussions and generates new and inclusive understandings of the world.

Ellis (2015) draws attention to the depths of autoethnographic research when she states, "Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and

revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful" (p.10). I sent an email to my adviser and said that an autoethnography was something of a journey in introspection. I explained that it was like letting yourself fall backwards through the thin and glassy floors of all that you have let define you for so many years. And as you fall through each floor, the uncertain parts of yourself, as well as all of the illusions, fall with you. When you hit the bottom, you suddenly have a very sharp view of who you have become, what it is you need to say, and what it is you need to do.

Gee (1999) looks at discourse analysis as an "analysis of language as it is used to enact activities, perspectives, and identities" (p. 4-5). In exploring the mining culture's language, it is evident that the stigmatizing expressions support and reinforce an industrial hierarchy that places disability on the lowest levels. Gee (1999) states, "we continually and actively build and rebuild our worlds not just through language, but through language used in tandem with…distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, feeling, and believing" (p. 11). It is important to understand and communicate why people use the labels and language they use to describe accommodated workers in the mining industry. In looking closely at the origin of the labels and language, we can analyze why workplace accommodation models are prone to slang terminology and attitudinal barriers (See Illustration III).

Industrial Language (High-Ranking to Low-Ranking)
Illustration III

Hard Rock,
Heavyweight,
Driver, High-Baller,
Go-Getter, Hard Core,
Big Gun, Mover, Shaker,
Big Dog, Machine

Milkman, Gimp, Wussy, Dog-fucker, Dogger,
Accommodated, Wimp, Maggot, Slacker,
Little Dog, Soaker, Lightweight,
Light Duty Guy

My research questions are personal and they place me at the centre of the study so I was feeling a bit apprehensive initially. I imagined someone asking, "Why would anyone want to hear what a labourer has to say about labelling and slang terminology?" But then I read *Writing Autoethnography: The Personal, Poetic, and Performative as Compositional Strategies* by Ronald J. Pelias (2013): "To share personal aspects of my life leaves me open to the evaluations of others. I am available to whatever constructions others may make of my disclosures. I remind myself, however, that I wish to be accepted or rejected on the basis of who I understand myself to be. I do not want to live a hidden life" (p. 388). And then I asked myself, "Why *wouldn't* anyone want to hear what a labourer has to say about labelling and slang terminology?"

Paltridge (2012) examines the manner in which language infers particular worldviews as well as particular understandings of the world. Partridge (2012) explains how discourse analysis, "examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. It also considers how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourse" (p. 2). It is my hope that my autoethnography gives rise to new perspectives and insights regarding workplace accommodation, labeling, and the othering that occurs in the mining industry.

I have a wide-reaching data source. I can look back on all of the highs and lows of what it is to be an accommodated worker in the mining industry. In addition to journaling, I have held on to all of my functional ability forms, my accident reports, medical restrictions, permanent impairment awards, meeting minutes, and hundreds of emails. I also have a complete copy of my file from the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba. The electronic communication is an especially interesting data-wellspring that is teeming with power-dynamics and their embodiment in written language. Stinson (2009) elaborates, "This autoethnography tells my story from an inside perspective. My experiences, my challenges, and my triumphs will be given a voice so that others in similar situations may gain better insight concerning their experiences"(p. 5).

Laurendeau (2012) refers to himself as "broken" and "not whole" after acquiring a sports injury that renders him temporarily disabled. Although challenged on the words *broken* and not *whole*, as they present disability as something less than the able-bodied ideal, Laurendeau (2012) argues, "That's the

point, isn't it? The point is to 'own' my complicity in (re)producing the very systems of alterity I aim to critique" (p. 15). In acknowledging his participation in a spoken construct that marginalizes and disempowers disability, Laurendeau positions himself as an insider that has *broken through* to the outside and, by doing so, embodies a fully experienced and more balanced view of disability in relation to masculinity and conventional and nonconventional ideologies. In the context of autoethnographic research, only in recognizing and identifying where we were, can we fully understand where we are, and the path we have taken to get there.

In *Decentering and Recentering the Ivory Tower: The Insights and Musings of an Interloper*, Johnson-Bailey (2013) points out "as humans we are inevitably mired in seeking out data to support what we already know" (p. 23). Johnson-Bailey (2013) suggests that decentering is not about *undermining* a location; rather it is about a return to, and a recentering of, the location and its complexities by sharing one's research, journey, and personal transformation. Johnson-Bailey's (2013) insights expanded my scope and furthered my autoethnographic approach when stating, "Previously, I would have asked, 'Why is this happening to me?' Now instead I ask, 'Why is this happening for me?' I know that on some level the dilemma hides a lesson, a teachable moment, and an opportunity to grow" (p. 16).

In communicating the othering that I've experienced, I think it's crucial to provide some of the details of my journey and identify and share the moments that are still very much a part of me. Pace (2012) states, "Like other genres of self-narrative, such as memoir, autobiography and creative non-fiction, autoethnography involves storytelling" (p. 5). I am going to close this chapter with

an excerpt from my journals. This story will allow me to begin my autoethnographic research at the beginning and help express why I will always see myself as a labourer first and an academic second.

It's the middle of winter and I'm working the graveyard shift. It's bone-cracking cold. The smelter looks like a giant stadium made of steel and stone. An aisle runs through its centre creating a wind tunnel of ice and snow. Electric arc furnaces made of firebrick, a hundred feet long and forty feet high, stare across the aisle at steel converters. They remind me of a mooring of warships anchored in dust, the weaponry on deck protecting cargoes filled with molten metal treasure.

A converter's mouth is agape and waiting for furnace matte. It blows low-pressure air into the molten metal bath and separates the slag from the metal. After the slag is removed, the metal is brought to an ingot-mould line. Spindrifts of orange and golden copper rain into the aisle and pop whenever they hit the ground. Eighty feet above, giant cranes on rails carry 20-ton ladles of molten metal from the furnaces to the converters and back again.

The slag eventually rises above the nickel and copper. The converter's cylindrical design allows it to roll forward and pour the top layer of slag into a ladle so it can be brought back to the furnaces for skimming. The slag is less dense than the nickel and copper so, once inside the furnace, it slides across the face of the heavier metals below to the back end where it's granulated and pumped onto giant black mountains of iron that overlook the town.

I'm training on the front end of the furnace and the operator is showing me how to open the tapping hole with a gas rod. It's like puncturing the sun with a 15-

foot needle. I step back as the molten metal surge blows outwards, hits a chute, and flows into a ladle in the pit. A few minutes pass and the ladle is near full so the operator motions for his helper to get into the mud-gun and plug up. The helper does what he's told. The gun is like a canon that slams against the furnace wall and fills the tapping hole with a clay that solidifies and stops the flow. But on this night, for whatever reason, the piston fails and the molten metal blows the head right off the canon. A rooster tail of metal soars across the deck and over the gun. In an instant, the crew is completely alive. The operator screams, "Get the fucking gun out of there!" It's pulled away from the stream and the ladle starts to overflow. Everyone knows exactly what to do. The crew starts grabbing equipment to get the gun back on line. A crane comes in and hooks the ladle out of the pit. Another crane drops an empty ladle in its place. The crane operators work in tandem and they're carrying and pouring metal into converters *on the fly*. I suddenly notice how big everyone is. They're like grizzlies. And I just stand there, stunned.

An old operator, his aluminum jacket catching molten light making it shine like the skin of a bloody star, walks up to me, points at the floor, and calmly says, "Grab me twenty boxes of clay from the shack and put them right here. When I tell you, open them and start firing the clay at the helpers. They'll load the gun. And don't get too close to the pit. You fall in there and she'll take you out screaming like a rabbit in a woodstove." As the crew works on the gun, I run to the shack on the back end and start hauling boxes of clay. I move fast and with purpose until sweat is dripping down my face, my chest, and my back. My muscles in my arms are pumped

and burning, and my adrenaline is singing and my body is doing exactly what I need it to do. I feel like Mercury on skates and I'm *highballing*.

I put the last box down. Another operator howls, "She's a bearcat!" He's laughing and the crane sirens are wailing and a symphony of hard sound starts to rock the aisle. Snow and pools of ice have been trapped beneath the spilled metal. The steam has been expanding and the pressure has been building, and now it's all letting go like a carpet bomb. The explosions fill the aisle with sparkles and fire and diamonds. It's like a sorcerer's dream.

I look up and notice the General foreman on the sky-landing across the aisle. He has an unlit cigar in his mouth and he's watching us. The gun is ready and we all start ripping open the boxes to fill up its chamber with clay.

The operator swings the gun into the stream, fire bouncing off his gear; he hits the piston sending clay into the tapping hole, and in an instant, it freezes over. Production is back on line. We all look up at the General. He lights his cigar and smoke moves around his head like a nickel-blue crown. He crinkles his eyes with satisfaction, nods at our crew, and walks away.

The operator turns to us, "Yup. My furnace is a bearcat. Let's take fifteen and then we'll clean this mess up." He's smiling. Everyone is smiling. We're all filthy and winded and soaked in sweat. I was young, and my hands were strong, and I promise you, I have never felt so *connected* and so *unafraid* because what I remember most of all is the way that everyone looked out for each other, it was beautiful.

This is where I'm from.

And this is where I belong.

Chapter IV: The Zero Accident Discourse

In *The Corporate Quest for Zero Accidents: A Case Study into the Response to safety transgressions in the Industrial Sector,* Twaalfhoven and Kortleven (2016) examine a multinational's steel making facility in the Netherlands, with iron ore mining operations in Canada, and its commitment to zero accidents and no harm to their employees. In my research, I have determined that there is a direct correlation between labelling workers and the drive for zero lost time accidents (See Illustration IV).

Twaalfhoven and Kortleven's (2016) study looks closely at the "Zero Accident Vision (ZAV), which aspires to a world without severe and fatal accidents, or, in some versions, even without accidents at all" and analyzes how private companies and multinationals "view safety aspirations and economic considerations as mutually reinforcing" (p. 57).

Twaalfhoven and Kortleven's (2016) study notes that a *harmony model* enables Zero Accident Vision-dedicated companies to strike a balance between two opposing rationales, safety and production. Furthermore, "by stating there is harmony or even synergy, ZAV- dedicated companies save themselves the need to formally choose between their commitment to high safety standards and their main goal of making profit" (p. 65).

I would suggest that the zero accident vision may steer employees towards what Festinger (1962) calls a "cognitive dissonance…the idea that if a person knows various things that are not psychologically consistent with one another, he will, in a variety of ways, try to make them more consistent" (p. 93). The emotional tension in

balancing the need for safety with the drive for profit, and supporting the zero accident vision is apparent in Twaalfhoven and Kortleven's (2016) study when a senior manager at the steel plant asserts, "I'm not concerned about whether or not it's feasible: what's important is that we do everything we can to get there" (p. 61).

In Twaalfhoven and Kortleven's (2016) study, they revealed that there were managers who believed that pursuing a safety and profit synergy contributed to stress on the job as there was an adversarial element beneath the harmony model's surface when stating, "It is shown that this harmony model does not entirely hold in practice" (p. 57). Later in this same study, one manager explains that "Safety and production are weighted against one another: Safety requires time, while such delays are undesirable with regard to the timely completion of work" and a second manager explains that preventative maintenance requires an operation shutdown and if the maintenance *suffers a delay,* "workers use all means necessary to make up for lost time, thereby taking extra risks" (p. 63).

Twaalfhoven and Kortleven's (2016) study includes several interviews with management and it becomes clear that *time pressure* for production-targets and profits requires shortcuts and unsafe behaviours on occasion - and this creates something of a quandary. Zero accidents can only be reached when management and the employees are working together with the best interests of all at the forefront, but a middle manager captures the illusory nature and transitory component in the zero accident safety and production model when stating, "We're in a dilemma. Basically, we need to regulate safety, but as the time pressure increases, well…" (p. 63).

In addition, Twaalfhoven and Kortleven's (2016) study points out, "striving for zero accidents provides a sort of intuitive stimulus to blame unsafe behaviour of individuals" (p. 58). So even though employees may put their personal safety at risk via shortcuts and violations to get the operation back on line and alleviate the time pressure on management and the operation as a whole, their efforts may be outweighed by the corporate culture's need to maintain the illusion of a zero accident vision.

According to Twaalfhoven and Kortleven's (2016) study, some managers "respond to safety incidents in ways that fit the paradigm of criminalizing human error, namely by punishing employees when deemed appropriate" (p. 64). So regardless of the circumstance or an employee's commitment to helping the team, there is a need to *blame* the employee for an accident as the practice of blaming the employee reinforces the company's commitment to safety while lessening the manager's responsibility for providing a safe working environment. When an injured employee is considered responsible for a safety violation or rule infraction, the employee may be penalized by way of disciplinary action and the corporation can then absolve themselves of any fault on their part and proceed with a *zeroing in* of their safety vision.

In *Exploring 'Zero Target' safety programmes in the UK construction industry,* Sherratt (2013) analyzes the zero target approach via conversations with managers and operators working for large-scale construction companies. In Sherrat's (2013) words, "In setting a blueprint utopian target of zero the entire vision becomes vulnerable; as a simple consequence of just one accident the target becomes

unachievable, it is lost, potentially disenchanting those it is seeking to inspire"

(p. 739). I would suggest that there is tremendous pressure to deliver on the success

of a zero target program for managers and workers alike, as a lost time accident will,

in all likelihood, tarnish the organization's brand. Sherratt (2013) continues, "By

their very construction, Zero Target programmes may inadvertently have a negative

effect on the very environment they wish to change" (p. 740).

According to Kirsch (2009), "The deployment of corporate oxymorons like

sustainable mining is one of the key strategies corporations use to conceal harm and

neutralize mining" (p. 92). Kirsch's (2009) research indicates that corporations are

taking the language of those who strive for social, cultural, and environmental

responsibility and making it their own. Gore (2013) features this practice when he

argues, "There is no such thing as *ethical oil*. There's only dirty oil and dirtier oil"

(http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/05/08/al-gore-ethical-oil_n_3238937.html)

Kirsch (2009) asserts that "Pollution from a single mining project can affect

hundreds of square miles and acid mine drainage can render environments

inhospitable to organic life for centuries" (p. 82). Kirsch (2009) throws light upon

the word *sustainable* and the way it has been reshaped and redefined by

multinationals to focus mainly on economic growth. His study observes that mining

companies dole out taxes and royalties and grants to businesses that may contribute

to the town's economic viability after the mine is closed – so it is the economy,

rather than the environmental and ecological ecosystem, that the industry is

referring to when we hear the words *sustainable mining*. Like Twaalfhoven and

Kortleven's (2016) study spotlighting the polarity that exists within the *zero*

accident lexicon implemented by a steel multinational, corporate oxymorons like *producing safely*, *sustainable mining*, *clean coal, and ethical oil* have a divisive nature that does not allow reality to be expressed clearly (Kirsch, 2009).

In working closely with management for several years, I discovered that there were some people who had become bureaucratized to the point that they seemed intolerant of new possibilities or approaches beyond the policies and practices that made up the existing business model. I recall a manager becoming quite irate when he was questioned on a company safety policy by a young supervisor in training in a classroom setting. The manager seemed confused and ill equipped to answer the young supervisor's questions. In desperation, the manager stormed across the room, stood in front of the young supervisor, and declared, "You are looking for holes in our system. We all have behavioural expectations and we mustn't question the system. There are no holes in our system. We mustn't challenge the system. We must lean on the system! We must lean on the system together." The room fell silent. The manager was pretty worked up. But then he seemed to be a little embarrassed for himself. Breathing heavily, he looked at his watch, shuffled his feet, mumbled something about a flight he had to catch, and scurried out the door. As he made his way down the hall, the young supervisor said, "Well, I think we've all learned something today. There is definitely a hole in the system. And it doesn't take long to spot it. It's that manager. What an asshole."

When people allow themselves to *lean on a system* that is not as firm or as stable as they believe it to be, they may find themselves falling into the hard face of a reality they have been working hard to avoid. In Naomi Klein's (2010) TED talk

Addicted to Risk, she mentions that the former CEO of BP Oil had a desk plaque that read – *If you knew you could not fail, what would you try?* The irony being he was the CEO at the helm for the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. Klein suggests that ridding oneself of the fear of failure may be beneficial if you are a triathlete in training, but those in power who oversee our economy and environment and workforce "would do better having a picture of Icarus hanging on the wall" because Klein feels the need for those in positions of authority "to be thinking about the possibility of failure all the time" (Klein 2010). In the context of high-risk industry and safety, Simpson, Horberry, and Joy (2009) state, "Despite all the major improvements in mine safety (both surface and underground), it remains one of the most intrinsically hazardous occupations in the world. Moreover, in mining (as in other industries) human error in some form is almost certainly the most prevalent of accident causal factors" (para. 1). Chasing down the dream of an accident free workplace while juggling the time pressures that accompany steady production numbers and preventative maintenance in the name of profit never ends well. An organization may give the number of days without a lost time accident a solid run, but Simpson, Horberry, and Joy (2009) explain:

In short, since humans have been interacting with their environment, errors have helped create potentially dangerous circumstances. Probably the only thing to have changed as industrialization developed is that the potential consequences of human error have grown as the systems within which people interact have become more complex (pg. 1).

Ultimately, the high speeds at which mining operations are expected to produce are enforced by greed, and the reality is that a zero target system needs to include a lot of zeros in the shareholders' quarterly net profits. Naomi Klein implores those in power to tread carefully – "Call it precaution: the principle that reminds us that life is too precious to be risked for any profit" (Klein 2010).

In the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell (1949) notes, "Doublethink allows people to hold two different ideas in their minds at the same time and to accept both of them. In this way they can live with a changing reality, including a changing past. The past must be changed all the time because the Party can never make a mistake. That is the most important reason" (p. 44). In the context of a modern day multinational, this way of thinking locks in the ideologies and strategies best suited for economic control and dogmatic beliefs about corporate policies and infallible safety visions. Whereas some managers may experience cognitive dissonance and other managers may embrace doublethink, it is a two-part lens of the same scope, and I believe its focal point skews and narrows the reality of heavy industry.

In circling back to Twaalfhoven and Kortleven's (2016) study, we are reminded of how a zero accident target contributes to an *intuitive stimulus* to blame the accident on the behaviour of the individual rather than set out to spelunk what may be the hollowness of the zero target directive. There is Orwellian Doublethink (1949) at work as the past is being changed to control the reality of the present and possibly stow away mistakes. It would not be outlandish to suspect that the number of disabling injuries in high-risk industries may be hidden within the ideal zero target narrative.

Along the same continuum, Sherratt (2013) stated:

Despite the reassurances of measurement, commitment to a target does not

mean automatic achievement, notwithstanding the celebrations that often

accompany the announcement…setting a target of zero could encourage sites

to *game the system*, to reclassify incidents to meet targets, to simply under-

report, or to seek out alternative processes for measurement (p. 739).

After following up on Sherrat's position, I discovered that Prism Economics and

Analysis wrote a claim suppression report for the Manitoba Workers Compensation

Board in late 2013 and it stated:

There appears to be significant under-claiming of WCB benefits in Manitoba

(…) In the unionized construction industry, it was suggested that non-

reporting of injuries is uncommon, unless the worker does not regard the

injury as serious. In the non-union construction industry, however, it was

suggested that non-reporting is more common and that employers

discourage employees from submitting WCB claims. In the construction

industry, companies may need to have below average reported injury rates

to be qualified bidders on some projects

(https://www.wcb.mb.ca/sites/default/files/Manitoba%20WCB%20Claim

%20Suppression%20Report%20-%20Final-1.pdf).

The drive for profit and the acquisition of new contracts appears to have an obscuring effect on the number of accidents that are actually occurring on non-unionized construction sites. The Institute for Work and Health (2014) adds, "The Prism review of Manitoba WCB files, coupled with the survey evidence, supports the conclusion that claim suppression is a material problem in the Manitoba Workers' Compensation system. The prism review of Ontario WSIB files shows a material risk of claim suppression, similar to the Manitoba findings" (https://www.iwh.on.ca/system/files/documents/iwh_briefing_claim_suppression_ 2014.pdf).

In Sherratt's (2013) words:

There is the potential for Zero Target thinking to bring change to health and safety management (…) but simply setting Zero Target is not itself worthy of celebration or indeed merit (…) It is the Target that is arguably hindering the achievement of Zero, providing distraction and comfort in the application of numbers and mathematics to something that is actually about the complex, awkward and immeasurable world of people and practice (p. 747).

A number of mining and construction companies are grounded in a process that expects one and all to work safely, produce safely, and pay tribute to the company flag flying the number of days that have passed without a lost time accident. Employees take comfort in knowing that everyone is safe and uninjured at shift's

end, production and profit are not at odds, and the harmony model is working. Ideally, the zero accident vision evokes both action and confidence. It reminds one of a common goal and it establishes a sense of *community*.

But then, suddenly, *boom*, the unwanted happens, a lost time accident occurs. The employee is seriously injured, and after a period in the hospital, he returns to work with a permanent disability. The company accommodates him, as it is their legal obligation, but as time passes, the employee's presence, in fact, his *close proximity* to the able-bodied team eventually challenges and confounds what Cook and Nemeth (2010) refer to as the "illusion of control" (p. 90).

So what happens to an employee when he is unfortunate enough to have a lost time accident that results in a permanently disabling injury? Becker (1981) states, "Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders" (p. 11). As an accommodated worker, I was labelled the *light duty guy* and Becker (1981) clarifies that I acquired this "status as a result of breaking a rule" (p. 14). It did not take me long to realize that I was now an *outsider*. Although I was assigned to the training department, I was often excluded from training seminars, business lunches, and educational day trips. When I asked why I was not invited to participate, I was always told that I was not really a part of the team. I recall a conversation I had with an *official* trainer who could not see why I believed that I should be invited to anything because I did not have a listed position with *his* team. He said, "You're accommodated, man. You got hurt. There is no pressure on you. Why should you get any perks?" After calmly pointing out the attitudinal

barriers and ableism at work (to absolutely no avail), I remembered something Al Gore (2006) said in *An Inconvenient Truth*, "You know, more than 100 years ago, Upton Sinclair wrote this, that 'It's difficult to get a man to understand something if his salary depends on his not understanding it'" (Guggenheim, 2006).

Cook and Nemeth (2010) explain why the accommodated are *labelled as outsiders* in stating, "Situating error in the individual raises the prospect of creating an orderly, rational world in which accidents are less likely. If failure comes from individual error, then attention may be safely directed to restrain or contain the individual" (p. 91).

In *Societal Reaction to Deviant Behaviour,* Kitsuse (1981) states, "The critical feature of the deviant-defining process is not the behaviour of individuals who are defined as deviant, but rather the interpretations others make of their behaviours, whatever those behaviours may be" (p. 23). I would suggest that an Orwellian doublethink takes hold of some members of staff and management. In *changing* the reality of the *past*, they can define the accommodated as deviant and blame them for their failings, and move ahead in their *official* positions with the team and continue to pursue their zero target directive (Orwell, 1949).

Cook and Nemeth (2010) state, "Problems such as production pressure and working conditions are difficult to affect. When the source of failure can be shifted to the unpredictable human operator, though, productivity and conditions do not need to be considered" (p. 91). The *light duty* label signals the *need* to distance workers with disabilities away and apart from the mainstream. Cook and Nemeth (2010) point out:
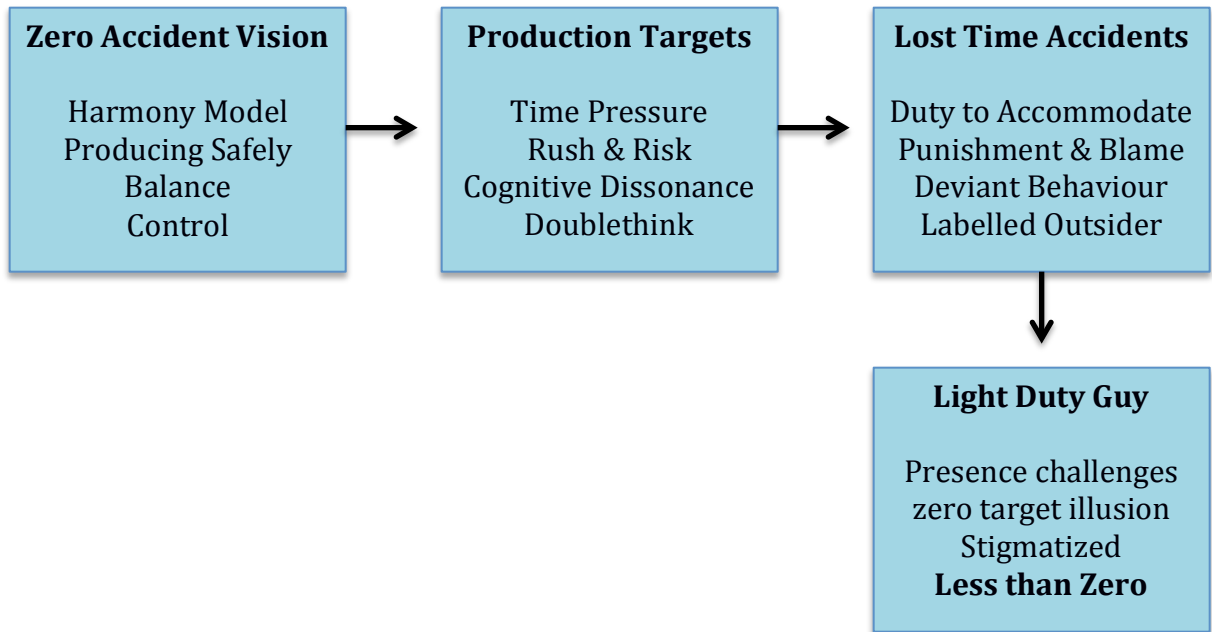
Pejorative qualities that are often attached to human error promote

distancing, such as suggestions that error arises from sloth or moral failing.

Others feel less at risk if error can be ascribed to a practitioner's deeply

seated, but personal, flaws. If accidents arise from forces and circumstances

in the environment, then the experience of my colleague has relevance for

me and the event increases my sense of hazard and uncertainty. By

attributing my colleague's accident to his inattention or stupidity, though, I

make it possible to believe that the accident has no relevance for me (…)

distancing limits and obscures the deeper examination of the sources of

accidents (p. 91).

In summary, the zero accident discourse perpetuates cognitive dissonance

and doublethink, as they are crucial to balancing the risk of rush-production and a

need for safety in the field. The research indicates that in the world of mining and

construction, language and numbers tell all. In a corporate context, lost time

accidents cost money and when you are a labourer who has been permanently

disabled on the job and you are in need of accommodations, your economic value is

less than zero.

Zero Accident Discourse and Labelling
Illustration IV

Zero Accident Vision	Production Targets	Lost Time Accidents
Harmony Model Producing Safely Balance Control	Time Pressure Rush & Risk Cognitive Dissonance Doublethink	Duty to Accommodate Punishment & Blame Deviant Behaviour Labelled Outsider

Light Duty Guy

Presence challenges
zero target illusion
Stigmatized
Less than Zero

Chapter V: Journals

After my accident, I was assigned to a light duty pool and placed in a training department outside of the smelter in the parking lot. The department was made up of several portable office trailers that had been welded together. The trailers had dirty little windows overlooking mountains of black slag as big as football stadiums. There was really nothing to see but blowing dust and sky. On cloudy days, the desolation and the black slag made me feel like I was alone on the moon-base of some far off planet.

I had a small office in the far end of the structure. It had a desk and a chair. There was a whiteboard on the wall. I did not have a computer. On occasion, an engineer would pop his or her head into my office. It was always the same. "So you're the light duty guy, eh?" They would make small talk and ask about my accident. They'd stare at my cast and get a good look at the bruise around my head. They'd always leave without asking me my name.

Eventually, I started to accept I was experiencing what Richards (2008) describes as being "squashed into a medicalized narrative"(p. 1719). Some of the veterans in the training department referred to me as "the light duty guy." It seemed that I had been assigned an identity and they didn't care to know anything else about me. And after the depths of my injuries were medically confirmed, my restrictions were filed and paper trails consisting of medical restrictions and information became a voice for what I could no longer do. In a medicalized

framework, the information was deficit-based and limiting, but it was the only voice I had.

I remember a supervisor pointing me out to a group of contractors and engineers, and, while I was within earshot, he said, "He was in an accident. He *gimped* his hand up pretty good, so now he's on light duty. Look at the ring of bruises around his head." Some of them stepped forward for a closer look. They didn't introduce themselves. They simply stared for a moment without looking into my eyes, nodded, and walked away. I felt like an animal in a display case.

There was an organizational chart in the hallway that was updated every week for the workforce. It listed the bid jobs and the names of all of the employees. There was a separate box on the bottom of the chart with the words LIGHT DUTY written across the top. My name was in this box along with a few others.

My supervisor was a big bastard named Goldman. He had wild eyes, scruffy hair, and a radical way of looking at the world. He was like a cross between Nick Nolte and a giant wolfhound. He was in his mid forties and he had been a union activist in his prime. He said he had signed over to management after taking a run at vice-president of the local union. He didn't pull it off and he became disenchanted with union politics and strategies. Goldman said that as time passed, he wished he'd stayed with the union. He said that that was where he belonged. "Sometimes youthful pride and anger get the better of us," he explained.

Now Goldman was a molten metal expert and a project manager. I began to notice that he was respected by all of those around him. Nobody messed with him. He loved to argue and it seemed to me that the angrier he got, the smarter he got.

Whether the topic was the mining operation, history, film, music, or politics, nobody could keep up with him. I liked him most of all because he didn't call me the light duty guy. He used my name.

Goldman stopped by every morning with a couple of cups of coffee and filled me in on the latest happenings and gossip at the mine site. His stories were comical and he always made me laugh. Other than Goldman, my visitors were few and far between. I started to think the members of my crew didn't know where I was. A few weeks passed and I just sat around the office passing the time reading mining journals. Goldman brought me a sketchpad and a pen one morning. "I used to journal when I was a kid. Try it out," he said. It was one month after my accident, and that's exactly what I did.

I have kept journals for the past eighteen years. I write in long hand and because my writing hand was held captive by a cast for eleven months, I taught myself to write with my left hand. It was awkward and slow going, but the process allowed me to think about what it was I was writing. My earliest recordings and words may be messy, but my thoughts and observations are very clear and detailed.

I felt lost after the accident. I was worried about my hand and I didn't like being a light duty guy. But the journals began to pile up and they started to take on a narrative that helped me make sense of this new world. Richards (2008) reveals that by "telling our stories, we make ourselves. We validate our new identities. We give meaning to our suffering. Our stories shape and structure our experiences rather than simply presenting them to a reader. They tell others who we are, but they also tell us. And more than this, they can make us who we are" (p. 1722). As the

years passed, whenever I found myself on the downside of advantage or in a situation that left me emotionally bruised, I would look to my journals. They became something of a touchstone and they reminded me that the stigmatization that I was experiencing was something I had handled before and I could handle again.

Transition

I wake up in the hospital. It's late at night. Someone flicks on a small light over my head. I'm groggy and my mouth is dry. There is an IV in my arm. There are medical students all around my bed. A doctor I have never seen before is talking about me like I'm a piece of meat. "The patient has been wearing a cast for six months. The muscles in the right arm have atrophied and, as you can see, the left arm is much bigger." The doctor is holding a clipboard. He keeps on going. "We have grafted the non-union fractures. The iliac crest bone was utilized as the point of harvest."

My back feels wet. With tremendous effort, I lift up a bit and touch the wetness with my left hand. I bring my hand to my face, look at my fingers, and realize they're covered in blood. The doctor, without missing a beat, says, "Get the nurses in here. There is some spillage at his hip." He places the clipboard under his arm and claps his hands twice with a sleekness and an authority that tells me he has played this role many times before. The nurses appear and they roll me on my side. I let out some kind of garbled cry. Was that really me? I am pretty sure my ass is hanging out. This is fucking humiliating. They start wiping up the blood. There is

sweat on my forehead. One of the medical students looks like the German figure skater Katarina Witt. She doesn't meet my eyes.

The doctor doesn't stop. "The injury is such that he will be wearing a cast for several more months. In my opinion, there will be a permanent loss of range of motion as well as degenerative osteoarthritic changes that will worsen with time."

I feel weak and helpless and ugly. I ask for water. The medical students ignore me and leave. The doctor does not say goodbye. What a prick. A nurse brings me a cup of juice. She says, "Everything is going to be okay. You're leaving in the morning." She is so goddamned nice. I feel like I'm going to break right apart. I thank her, take a sip, and stare at my skinny right arm.

Denied

In April of 1998, I applied for an educational leave of absence. The next day a company representative stopped by my office to tell me that they couldn't approve my leave because they had meaningful work for me to do. She handed me a slip that said, "Denied". And then she said it'd be best for me to quit the mine and return to school to get a degree. I was confused and I remember asking her, "Which is it? You're giving me mixed signals. You're telling me that you need me here, but you're suggesting that I quit. I can't quit. How will I support myself? My hand doesn't work." She shrugged her shoulders as if to say "not my problem" and then she left.

It's instances like these that spotlight the value of an autoethnography. Morella (2008) reinforces this by saying:

I have conducted my own inquiry into how communication studies can

participate in social justice, and I fail to see how this can happen without a

method such as autoethnography. Without knowing the stories of those

whose lives we wish to touch, how can we possibly know where to start?

How can we begin to define social justice, or make calls for it, without

knowing what social injustices look like? We need to hear from those who

are suffering, downtrodden, marginalized, and the silenced (p. 40).

Some supervisors started asking me what I was doing in the office all day. I

had worked with my hands and my body for years and now I was hurt. It was clear

that I wasn't doing much physically and it was kind of embarrassing. A few days

later, the company representative returned and encouraged me to quit again. I told

her that my surgeons said I'd need an extensive period of physiotherapy after the

cast came off. She asked, "So you're planning on sitting around here on light duty for

another year? I was speechless for a moment and then I said, "If you get me a

computer, I can contribute a little more." She actually smiled and replied, "You're a

light duty worker. If we get you a computer, we'll have to get all of the light duty

workers computers. And that's not going to happen. You're not helping yourself with

your bad attitude, you know?"

Chapter VI: No Man's Land

After my accident, it was as though the "light duty" label had applied a measure of weight and mass to my new role in the working environment. When I was called the "light duty guy", I often felt flustered and my inability to participate in the physical role that I had been hired to do before my injury proved frustrating.

Nielsen (2015) states that "the negative aspects of a more masculine, hierarchical culture may include a fear of seeming weak and 'soldiering on', being reluctant to seek help, even when they need it"(p.18). Admitting vulnerabilities and acknowledging that you are being stigmatized implies a weakness or an admission that you cannot look out for yourself.

Lord and Hutchison (1993) suggest that "The Process of Empowerment" in people is born from a state of powerlessness brought on by systems that do not meet their needs. I learned that a loss of control and the suspicion that you no longer matter is emotionally debilitating and draining. Eventually, I started to feel like I was being held captive and I slipped into what Lord and Hutchinson (1993) would call a "state of prolonged dependency" (p. 9).

Galinsky, Hugenberg, Groom, and Bodenhausen (2003) suggest that reappropriating and rejecting a negative label "and changing it from something hurtful to something empowering" is preferential to feeling conquered and taking umbrage to its stigma and damaging impact (p. 222). Goldman (my supervisor) and I reclaimed some of the language and we began to refer to everything that was going on around me and everything that I did as *meaningful*. Whether it was making a cup of tea, walking down the hall, or going to the toilet, we made a point of letting

everyone know that I was partaking in *meaningful* work and it was going to be a *meaningful* day. In the strongest sense, he helped me take a key word from an exclusionary policy and make it mine. It was empowering to make a mockery of a policy that prevented accommodated workers from returning to school to maximize their potential and develop the skills that would allow them to make a real contribution to the company.

My disability is non-visible. That is to say, my hand looks like it should work the way it used to before my accident. The chronic pain and the loss of grip strength and flexion are not as obvious as an accommodated worker with a missing leg or a patch on the eye. I was met with a cynicism by some, and on more than one occasion was referred to as a "milkman" as some of the staff believed that I was "milking" *their* system. These are experiences that a large part of me wants to leave behind. But as I write and share my memories, I find that the process is amplifying my consciousness and somehow squeezing light and realizations from the darkest parts of my past. Ellis (2007) states, "Writing difficult stories is a gift to self, a reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from our pain…as researchers, we long to do ethical research that makes a difference" (p. 26). I forged ahead tolerating the labels and the humiliation, and I promised myself that I would help contribute to an improved accommodated workplace model in the future.

I had my surgery some months later. Goldman came to see me in the hospital that night. My girlfriend, my sister, my mom, and a few friends stopped by as well. I realized later that Goldman was the only one from the mine who checked in on me. I captured my thoughts before and after the bone grafting surgery. I was off work for

seven days and I remember hobbling back into work even though my doctor told me to stay off work for a month. The labeling, the othering, and the name-calling had made me ashamed of my injury so I wanted to impress everyone with a quick return. By this time I understood that time off work meant compensation, and compensation made the company's premiums jump. From a cost perspective, it was much cheaper to have disabled employees on the mine site doing next to nothing than it was for them to be at home convalescing. My hip had been opened to harvest bone for my wrist. It was sore and I had somewhere in the range of thirty stitches. The walk through the gate to the training department was about a quarter of a mile. I was certain that this would score me points with the company reps and I'd be authorized to take an education leave down the road. Even though my hip and wrist hurt, I kept it to myself and I pretended that I was okay. In her book *Self-Compassion*, Kristin Neff (2011) explains, "even when our problems stem from forces beyond our control, self-kindness is not a culturally valued response. Somewhere along the line we got the message that strong individuals should be stoic and silent toward their own suffering like John Wayne in a western" (p. 42). By the time I had made it to the "moon-base" some of the stitches had busted open and there was blood on my jeans. Goldman arrived and he seemed to get a kick out of what I'd done. He gave me an old CD player later that afternoon and a pile of Creedence Clearwater Revival, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen CDs. "You're one crazy bastard, Mitchell! How's the hip? Still bleeding? Here! Now you can listen to music while you journal," he laughed. I remember how good it felt for someone to say my name. Looking back, that was one of the best days I had on the moon-base.

As time went on, I became something of a pariah. I started letting people know that I didn't like being called the light duty guy. They seemed offended. Some pushed back by saying, "Well, you are a light duty guy." I would remind them that I had a name. Eventually I was branded a troublemaker. Other than Goldman, no one paid much attention to me. Goldman would head off to run a crew or make a presentation in a meeting and I was left alone. The "good mornings" started to dry up. It was like people couldn't see me. I felt like a ghost. But then old supervisors I had never met before started coming by my office to ask me when I was *getting the fuck back to work*. They said "I had it made" and "the vacation's over" and some asked where the CD player came from. When I told them that Goldman had given it to me they backed off. They seemed really upset that I hadn't left yet. Some of them pressed me for medical documentation even though I told them that I had had surgery and it was clear that I was wearing a cast. It happened so often that I hung my medical restrictions on the wall. Most of the old supervisors carried rings of keys on their belts. You could hear their keys jingling when they approached my office. The sound of jingling keys still makes me uneasy. I had never heard of "othering" but now it's obvious that this was around the time that it really started happening to me.

One morning I found a sign on my office door. Someone had written the word GIMP on cardboard in black marker. There was an engineer drinking coffee in the hallway. When I looked at him, he chuckled and put his hands up in a kind of *I surrender* pose and said, "It wasn't me, man!" I had a strong sense that he knew who had put the sign up though. I smiled and acted like it didn't bother me, but inside I was smoldering. Bennett and Shurmer-Smith (2001) state, "Occasionally, it all

seems too dramatic. But writing is dramatic because it is about making a point, selecting, labeling, and cementing through language" (p. 256). I left the sign on my door. I didn't want them to know it upset me. A couple of days later it disappeared. I am pretty sure Goldman took it down.

After several weeks of being needled by supervisors and the company rep, I told Goldman what was happening. He listened and nodded and then he said, "It's like a game, you see? If they let you stay at home, it'll jack up their insurance premiums. So they tell Workers Comp that they have meaningful work for you. And here's the catch, the company gets to decide what's meaningful. But most of these guys don't know their arses from a hole in the ground. They wouldn't know meaningful work if it punched them in the face. Half this management team doesn't even know what they themselves are supposed to be doing. Never mind the light duty guys. So if you complain about not having anything to do, they'll make it shitty for you, so it's best to say nothing. You've got it made. Play along with the illusion. If they are going to deny you education leave, just keep coming in and they can keep paying you. They want you to quit. They want you off the books. They're trying to wait you out. But you'd be crazy to quit. Stick around." And then he roared with laughter and said, "They want to play games, eh? I'll be right back." He returned with a clipboard and a notepad and said, "Take your journal with you and bring your pen. We are going to a meeting. You're going to be my minute-taker from now on." After that, I went with him everywhere. I'd scribble notes in his meetings. I'd scribble notes in the hallway. I'd get geared up and we'd head out on the floor so he could assess molten units with the contractors and the engineers, and I'd scribble down

more notes. We'd stop by the furnace shacks and he'd talk to the operators about the best way to run a unit, and when there was a crowd, he'd turn to me and say, "Did you get that, Mitchell? That sounded pretty *meaningful* to me. Write this down!" And I would.

In fact, I'd write everything down. Including casual conversations with other accommodated workers. I was lucky because Goldman shielded me for quite a few years. Not every accommodated worker meets a Goldman. So I feel this kind of research is an important first step in making workplace accommodation better.

I remember some accommodated workers quitting. Workers would blow out their knees or their backs or lose an eye or a leg. They would return from surgery and after a couple of months, they'd grow frustrated with their lack of responsibilities as well as the way they were treated and leave.

Denshire (2013) emphasizes:

It is important to press on with the autoethnographic project. That is, to destabilize and redraw the boundaries between a professional's work and their life to benefit previously silenced actors. There is an ethical need in both teaching and research contexts for autoethnographic texts that expand practice interactions to include all the actors involved, and represent moments of professional practice from more than one viewpoint (p. 9).

On paper, the duty to accommodate is a wonderful piece of legislation. But in reality, it's a construct that blocks access to the education and training that will give a worker with a disability equality of opportunity and outcome, and what is more, it allows workers with disabilities to be worn down, stigmatized, and pressured into leaving. When accommodated employees quit, compensation boards will not retrain them for new jobs because they were already being provided with meaningful work and an income. At this point, the disabled employee is on his own and in *no man's land*.

I remember Goldman saying, "Whenever an accommodated worker quits, they never replace him with someone new. Ever notice that? So how *meaningful* can their work really be? If a hard rock miner or a furnace operator quits, they can't get a replacement in here fast enough."

Accommodated workers in the mining and construction industry have been left unheard and their circumstances have been left uncharted for far too long, so I am honour-bound in ensuring that my voice is their voice and this research is *our* map towards a workplace free of negative labelling, deficit-based language, and systemic disadvantages.

Chapter VII: The Bottom Line

Corporations have an obvious incentive in convincing the general population that they are socially and environmentally responsible, and good corporate citizens as Canada's natural resources are of tremendous economic benefit. In the documentary *The Corporation,* Michael Moore explains, "I believe the mistake that a lot of people make when they think about corporations is they think that corporations are like us. They think they have feelings, they have politics, they have belief systems, they really only have one thing: the bottom line, how to make as much money as they can in any given quarter. That's it" (Achbar and Abbott, 2003). From the outside, it is easy to mistakenly believe that corporations truly care about people. The reason for this is that the multinationals' brightest minds are highly skilled at a communicative embroidery of sorts whereby they knit their corporate language in and out and through human rights legislation, antidiscrimination guidelines, and environmental policies until most anyone would believe that nothing could possibly be amiss inside such a wonderfully wrapped package. But when you are caught beneath a corporation's glossy veneer, you realize that there are tremendous gaps between legislation and reality.

The Steelworkers' union expose these gaps when sharing their involvement:

in national and international projects to identify the core elements of an effective workplace program for accommodating workers with disabilities, in particular the International Labour Organization's Code of Practice on managing Disability in the Workplace and the Canadian Code of Practice by

the National Institute for Disability Management. Despite our efforts,

challenges continue to grow for unions. Increasingly we hear of harassment

of workers with disabilities on the job, conflict, and discrimination. There are

increasing numbers of workers who need to make disability claims related to

stress and mental illness (http://www.usw.ca/act/activism/human-

rights/resources/opening-doors-usw-policy-on-disability-rights).

If you are an employee fully engaged in exactly what it is you were hired to do, you

can move through your workweek without giving it too much thought. But if you are

not doing what it is you were hired to do, organizations will replace you with

someone who will. When you are a hands-on worker who has been disabled in a

workplace accident, the *duty to accommodate* does not allow those in power to

replace you. Furthermore, they do not want to retrain you because you have been

branded undeserving via the light duty label.

      Russell (2000) states, "If the goal of social justice is to ensure the dignity of

each and every person, then buying into the largely capitalist-induced belief that

work equates with self-esteem or is a condition for membership of the human race –

that people are labourers first and human beings second – only serves to oppress us

all" (p. 223). In the mining industry, to be disabled on the job is to be rendered

incapable of what it is you are paid to do - so it follows that you are no longer a

productive part of the team and you are quickly dissociated from the miners who

are getting the job done. Full membership and a full pay check in mining and

construction is conditional on a working body that is both valuable and profitable.

In a corporate arena, the expectation and demand for labour and profit always has the upper hand over respect for human dignity.

The duty to accommodate incites a frustration in many managers, as they cannot replace the ineffective disabled labourer with an effective able-bodied labourer. There appears to be a retributive rationale in management's refusal to give a labourer with a disability the *choice* to acquire an education and contribute on a higher level. Smith (1990) states, "For bureaucracy is par excellence that mode of governing which separates the performance of ruling from particular individuals, and makes organization independent of particular persons and local settings" (p. 158). Deveau (2008) points to what "Smith calls an ideological circle. An ideological circle is a process invented by the ruling apparatus to force people to do what is required to enable the ruling apparatus to maintain its power over those who are being ruled" (p. 8). The workplace accommodation model keeps labourers with disabilities in place and *under rule* as an educational pursuit is at the employer's discretion. When an employer says that there is meaningful work to do, an accommodated employee is held back from school and prevented from becoming something more. Deveau (2008) draws on Smith's ruling apparatus when stating, "We are not ruled by Supreme Court magistrates, but by ordinary people who work in governments, in universities, and in business corporations" (p. 6). In mining and construction, it follows that *ordinary people*; for example, engineers, geologists, and operators, rise through the ranks until they are in charge of large groups of people. Because these industrial leaders are not Supreme Court magistrates, lawyers, or judges, they do not evaluate the mining and construction world with the measure of

understanding required to promote justice and human rights as they are simply lacking in the legal and academic qualifications (Deveau, 2008).

Management's attitudinal barriers tend to imprison accommodated workers in a meaningful work paradigm that is *meaningless*, as it does not truly value disabled workers and rarely does it maximize their potential via training and education.

The Supreme Court establishes laws to dispose of unfair and discriminatory practices. Mining executives are more than capable of meeting the minimum legislative requirements and delivering on their legal duties, but they see little beyond meeting their production targets, profit margins, and pleasing the members of the corporation's board.

There is an exchange in the movie *The Company Men* where an HR director is having a discussion with an executive about laying off a number of employees to increase profits for the shareholders. The HR director says, "I'm confident all these dismissals will stand up under legal scrutiny." The executive asks, "What about ethical scrutiny?" And the HR director replies with some frustration, "We're not breaking any laws." After a moment the executive says, "I guess I always assumed we were trying for a higher standard than that" (Wells, 2010).

This scene is fitting because the company leaders tend to business as usual and have little consideration for the members of their workforce who do not fit into their limited view of normalcy. Human rights are little beyond a smudge on the periphery of capitalism. Successful profit margins and steady and consistent value for the shareholders overshadows an interest in promoting inclusion and diversity.

If a worker with a disability is persuaded to wrap up his or her career, no one will raise an eyebrow. In mining and construction, labourers with disabilities are no longer producing so if they quit they will be happily replaced with the able-bodied.

Williams-Whitt (2007) explains that accommodated workers are disruptive to production in the eyes of some managers and a worker's disability may be met with suspicion. Some managers are not happy about having to meet their legal obligations to accommodate. The time it takes to create an accommodation plan as well as the costs of carrying an accommodated worker are not welcome. Williams and Whitt (2007) explain how "accommodations were sometimes designed as a form of vigilante justice. Managers would make disparaging comments regarding productivity or punish the employee by assigning the least desirable shifts and duties" (p. 414). I remember adapting to the humiliation and the indignity of being labelled because I thought that it was a function of my new role. Some supervisors made me feel guilty about my disabling injury. They'd shake their heads and say things like, "Living the dream" and "Look at you getting money for nothing."

In the documentary *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*, Noam Chomsky explains that profit-driven multinationals control the media. As a result, the media targets two groups via propaganda and misinformation. The first group consists of a political class. They are in charge of managing economic and political life, and their consent is pivotal as they serve the *bottom line* needs of the corporate elite. The second group are the "80 percent of the population whose main function is to follow orders (…) and they're the ones who usually pay the costs" (Achbar and Wintonick, 1992). Billion dollar multinationals can employ the

brightest minds to "assure our faith in the corporate world view and seduce us with beguiling illusions designed to divert our minds and manufacture our consent" (Achbar and Abbott, 2003).

Maté (2016) elaborates, "The very nature of the economic system says that what matters is not who you are but how you are valued by others. It's a materialistic society and what that specifically means is we value is not who people are but what they produce (...) and the people who do not produce they are ostracized, shunted aside, and totally devalued" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_j5mmBa4mw).

Essentially, people are engaging in their own oppression. Given our biology and the reality that we biodegrade over time, disability is something that will eventually impact all of us. But the masses have *bought in* to the belief that utility and function is crucial to fitting in and belonging, and once you belong you always will, and therein lays the political power of capital and ableism. In the theatre of commerce and production, the able-bodied label and stigmatize the accommodated because they have been persuaded to believe that workers with disabilities are simply not *earning their keep*.

Chapter VIII: Control

Poulos (2013) describes "a pattern of control-resistance" whereby people get caught up in a power dynamic that is very hard to escape (p. 474). As the control and oppression intensifies, so does the anger and resistance. When I was labelled a light duty guy, I felt pigeonholed and undervalued. The label was like a heated branding iron that marked me as inadequate. Whenever someone called me a light duty guy or when someone suggested I quit, it motivated me to stay.

After being denied an unpaid educational leave of absence several times on the company grounds that they could not spare me as they had meaningful work for me to do, I had a meeting with a manager regarding my desire to return to school. His eyes were alligator-grey and there was something synthetic about him. After some small talk, I asked him why they wouldn't let me return to school. He told me that if I really wanted to go to school I should quit and just go. When I pushed back and said that I wasn't feeling challenged and I wanted an education so I could contribute to the organization on a higher level. He said, "You're a light duty guy. We don't owe you anything beyond meaningful work. And I get to decide what's meaningful. My understanding is that your left hand works just fine. So if you're not feeling challenged with your little job in training, we can give you plenty of toilets to scrub starting Monday."

I had never been talked to that way in my entire life. Not that there is anything wrong with scrubbing toilets. Hell, I've worked filthier jobs in construction. It was his tone. It was so threatening and so superior. And it pissed me off.

Mass media has a tendency to present disability as pitiful and feeble (Charlton, 2010; Saxton, 2010; Haller, 2010). This portrayal has a strong influence on the way accommodated workers are perceived in mining and construction. The takeaway is that disability is tragic and the disabled are helpless. Griffo (2014) explains how the charity model of disability is "overlaid with segregatory practices of social exclusion (…) which mark those they took in with a strong social stigma and made them socially undesirable" (p. 148). It follows that many managers believe that accommodated workers should be grateful for their employment and welcome the *duties* of their new social station whatever they may be.

The company manager had every intention of keeping me in my place the second he called me a light duty guy. Charlton (2010) states, "The dehumanization of people with disabilities through language has a profound influence on consciousness. They, like other oppressed peoples, are constantly told by the dominant culture what they cannot do and what their place is in society" (p. 157). I would like to say that I made some witty remark and got the upper hand but truth be told, he just kept rambling on about what a great company it was and what a privilege it was to work for them in any capacity. I just sat there unable to speak. I was locked up with rage.

Matt Damon plays a janitor named Will in *Good Will Hunting* (Van Sant, 1997). Will has a dark past and it is this darkness that prevents him from moving ahead. After a brush with the law, Will is court ordered to see a psychologist named Sean, played by Robin Williams, with the hope that Will can get back on track and put his brain to use. While in a therapy session, Will tells Sean that his foster father

would beat him when he was a kid. His foster father would put a belt, a stick, and a wrench on the table and say *choose.* Sean says he would have to go with the belt. But Will tells Sean that he would always take the wrench. Sean is surprised and asks him, "Why the wrench?" And Will responds, "Because fuck him, that's why."

I refused to leave because I did not want the company manager to get the upper hand. Monday rolled around and I went back to training. I never saw the manager again. Last I heard, he was packaged off and had taken up with a Monkees tribute band in Chicago.

My neighbour Quint worked as a hard rock miner for 29 years. He was a vision of muscle and strength and he had a reputation for highballing. His coworkers called him *quick Quint* because he worked fast and he always helped the team exceed their production bonuses. One night a piece of loose struck him on the head and broke his neck. His spinal cord was bruised but not severed. The doctors said that it was the muscles in his back and shoulders that kept the cord intact. Quint could walk afterwards, but his body was no longer the same. He was given permanent restrictions and accommodated near a research lab. Quint told me that they placed him in an office at the end of the hall without a computer or a phone. He said that it was bizarre that he was getting paid to just sit around. He befriended some of the lab workers and he would pop by to visit them in the coffee room on occasion. A few weeks passed and then, one afternoon, a supervisor pulled Quint aside and said, "I don't want you bothering my scientists anymore. I expect you to stay in your assigned area. You're a light duty worker. This area is off limits." Quint was awestruck. But then he laughed in the supervisor's face and told him to fuck off.

Quint shared the encounter with the lab workers. The lab workers were disgusted and they decided to start having their coffee breaks in Quint's office. A manager named Natasha heard the story and she gave Quint a computer, an email address, and a phone. Afterwards, she had Quint work on training manuals and such. The supervisor never said another word. When you are an accommodated worker it could go either way. You could wind up alone and isolated or you could become a part of a team. Meaningful work is at the company's discretion so your duties and standing have everything to do with who is in charge of the area that you're placed in. After retiring, Quint said, "If I hadn't told that supervisor off, it would have been a sad end to my career. I feel bad for the guys who need accommodations that are only five or ten years into their careers. I heard that Natasha is leaving. Now where the hell are they to turn if they meet up with that power tripping supervisor after she's gone?"

Charlton (2010) adds, "Oppression is a phenomenon of power in which relations between people and between groups are experienced in terms of domination and subordination, superiority and inferiority. At the center of this phenomenon is control. Those with power control; those without power lack control" (p. 153). Quint took control and powered through the supervisor's ableism and ignorance. I believed that the only thing to do was resist the organization's wish to see me leave. By staying, I was taking control. If I left, they won. That became my mantra. As the months passed, my presence alone felt like a victory. I experienced some long and empty days while I was there. But, as Goldman used to say, *we must endeavour to persevere.*

Chapter IX: Journal Entry

In 2002, I got lucky. This executive showed up from Toronto unannounced. He wandered into my office and asked for a tour. I had no idea who he was. I was listening to Springsteen and he said, "The Boss has quite the catalogue." We started talking about our favourite Springsteen songs and we went for a tour.

We walked around and he asked a lot of questions about the operation and then he asked me what I did. I told him that I didn't do much. I said I was being accommodated for an injury and I was hoping to return to school on an unpaid leave someday. He asked me what was holding me back, so I told him my story. After the tour, he thanked me and wished me luck in school. I thought that that was a weird thing for him to say, but I shook his hand and we said our goodbyes.

That afternoon an HR rep stopped by and said that they had no idea that I wanted to go to school. That was pure bullshit and I was about to call him on it. But then he asked me when I wanted to leave. I thought he was kidding. Then he told me that the executive had approved a leave of absence for me to go back to school. If the executive didn't like Springsteen, it probably wouldn't have happened. I left in the fall, worked the summers, and hit the books in the winter.

By 2006, I had completed a B.A. (Honours) from the University of Winnipeg and things at work start to improve. A manager is impressed by my drive. He tells me that I have *grit* and he gives me a training department of my own. I supervise the summer students, look after accommodated workers, and shoot training videos. One of the films showcases an employee who has been disabled in a workplace accident.

He shares his story to raise awareness and promote safety consciousness in the workplace.

I'm unionized and I like being a United Steelworker. It is the best of both worlds. I am working with management and I am part of the union. This gives me the authority to say whatever is on my mind, whenever I want, to whomever I want without fear. I walk the wall between management and the union on the safety committee and this keeps me busy.

It's a sweet deal.

Years pass and I start working for them online while pursuing a Master's Degree in Winnipeg. I plan on creating a mentorship program for accommodated workers with disabilities in mining and construction. Education and training are the keys. I'm the living model. But then there is a takeover. A foreign multinational has bought the operation and they package off all of the veterans in management.

George Clooney plays a 'fixer' named Michael who operates behind the scenes at a law firm that handles multi-billion dollar suits in *Michael Clayton* (Gilroy, 2007). Upon hearing of a merger, Michael realizes that he does not have a *real* role with the firm. He confronts his boss and voices his concerns. "You're my meal ticket. I mean, let's face it, once this is out of your hands, I'm screwed. You'll be cashed out and I'll be staring at a bunch of strangers trying to explain what the hell it is I do." His boss tries to reassure Michael and tells him that he's valuable and that he has made a niche for himself. But we get the strong sense that Michael's career is doomed. When you are an accommodated worker, it does not matter what you have accomplished or how much you are contributing. I was maintaining the company

website, and writing policies and procedures online in an unofficial capacity. My role was not on the books. Upon hearing of a takeover, I somehow knew that what I was doing was not enough. Hansen (2002) indicates that there is "the constant fear of being 'on approval' in the non-disabled world" (p. 180). After the takeover was finalized, everyone I worked for was gone. I suddenly found myself "staring at a bunch of strangers trying to explain what the hell it is I did."

I sent out an email to the new president. He met with me and I pitched my idea for a mentorship program and gave him a mug I had brought back from school. The president seemed to like the mug and he set up a meeting with the new management team.

The next day I sat down with some people I've never seen before.

I talked about the duty to accommodate and the way it boxes people in and keeps them in place. I talked about the value of an education and the importance of empowering each and every employee on the team. I talked about choice and potential and the chance for us to create a better system.

Nobody seems that interested.

Someone yawns. Somebody else gets up and leaves.

So I bring up Bill 26 – The Accessibility for Manitobans Act and read passages from the Act itself, "Accessibility will improve the health, independence, and well being of persons disabled by barriers. Persons disabled by barriers face a wide range of obstacles that prevent them from achieving equal opportunities, independence and full economic and social integration. The purpose of this Act is to achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers that disable people with

respect to employment, accommodation, and a prescribed activity or undertaking. In achieving accessibility, regard must be had for the following principles:

Access: Persons should have barrier-free access to places, events and other functions that are generally available in the community.

Equality: Persons should have barrier-free access to those things that will give them equality of opportunity and outcome.

Universal design: Access should be provided in a manner that does not establish or perpetuate differences based on a person's impairment.

Systemic responsibility: The responsibility to prevent and remove barriers rests with the person or organization that is responsible for establishing or perpetuating the barrier. And nothing in this Act or the regulations diminishes the obligations of a person or organization with respect to persons with disabilities under any other enactment, and, in particular, under The Human Rights Code" (https://web2.gov.mb.ca/bills/40-2/b026e.php).

I explain that when this Bill comes into force, the duty to *accommodate* will become the duty to *empower*. I'm pretty pumped and I'm expecting them to all come around. Someone says, "You've got a lot of passion."

The president shows up. There is, what appears to be, marshmallow foam all over his upper lip and on the tip of his nose. Nobody in the room lets him know. A discussion follows about zero accident targets and their great safety statistics and whether there is a need for a new accommodation system. According to them, their safety record is so amazing that disabling injuries are about to become a thing of the past. The rest is doublethink and white noise.

I thank everyone for their time and decide to throw a Hail Mary pass. I look around the room and say, "I think that went well."

Nobody responds.

And then the president says, "We'll decide how this went after you leave."

It's over.

Afterwards, people seem more interested in my permanent restrictions and rate of pay than what I have been contributing over the years. I was suddenly *on approval* and I had to relive the stigma of having been disabled in a workplace accident again. A payroll coordinator walks into my office and tells me that I'm getting paid way too much for a *light duty guy*. She tells me that I'm accommodated so I have no rate protection. I laugh. She turns red.

A couple of days later, I get in an argument with a manager about my push for a mentorship program. He asks me why I think we should reward the accommodated for their disabling injuries.

I tell him it's about choice and self-determination and if an accommodated worker wants to take a leave of absence and go to school to acquire the skills to contribute to the organization on a higher level, nobody should hold them back. I talk about equity and levelling the playing field and fairness and access to opportunities that will maximize one's professional potential and help the company. He sighs and then he tells me that the organization is providing meaningful work for the light duty guys and fulfilling their legal requirements and that's good enough. He adds that Bill 26 is nothing more than aspirational.

And then he says, "We're not a social agency. If we make it too good for the light duty guys, people will start disabling themselves on purpose." Sadly, he is not the first manager to voice this concern. I'm profoundly embarrassed for him.

And then something clicks in my head.

I'm dealing with an old regime.

These guys don't want to let go of the past because it's all they know. I think of all the money mining and construction pulls in. And I think it is strange that some people are greedy with what isn't even theirs. But these guys are all deep into their careers and they are very close to retirement and moving on.

The manager keeps talking. I think about the millennials. In Canada, they helped oust former Prime Minister Harper and elect Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. In the United States, they pushed for Bernie Sanders. They are smarter and kinder than my generation and so much more informed. They want to see people do well. They want to do away with systemic barriers. They want to see everyone get a shot. They understand how important it is to share. I believe in them. I really do. I think that the millennials are going to save the goddamned world. But I decide to keep that one close to my chest. I smile and thank the manager for his time.

I worked as a labourer until I was 28.

I smashed up my wrist in a mining accident.

I was accommodated for fifteen years.

But that doesn't mean I'm a light duty guy.

I'm a lot more than that.

And I have a name.

Epilogue

The "light duty" label and slang terminology used to describe accommodated workers is reductive and debilitating in that it dismisses their potential and fails to recognize an economic advantage in their development. What is more, the "light duty" label characterizes a person with a disability as undeserving and worth less than the able-bodied members of the workforce.

It has been my experience that the strongest and best leaders pay attention to the person first and they make a point of finding out who people are. They understand that when we use a person's name he or she is recognized as an individual and it this individuality that gives people confidence, equal footing, and a solid foundation to build on. This is the leadership we need to become something more than accommodated workers.

The Charity Model of Disability portrays people with disabilities as pitiful victims of misfortune in need of financial care and assistance. The Charity Model also infers that people with disabilities who are receiving charitable aid should be grateful and obedient as cash contributions alone fulfill and exceed the benefactor's social responsibility and obligations (http://www.copower.org/leadership/models-of-disability).

The Duty to Accommodate mirrors the Charity Model in the sense that accommodated employees are expected to be grateful and accepting of their light duty roles because their employers are providing them with an income. Until accommodated employees are encouraged to decide what is meaningful and given the choice to maximize their contributive value via training and an education, if that

is the path they would like to take, meaningful work will continue being meaningless in a human rights capacity. To best reflect the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, the employer's duty to accommodate and provide meaningful work needs to be modernized and recharged. It follows that the duty to *empower* persons with disabilities and provide work that is *truly* meaningful will transform the Canadian mining and construction industry for the better.

I encourage today's mining and construction leaders to do away with the attitudinal and systemic barriers within the workplace accommodation model, actualize Canadian human rights laws, embrace inclusion and diversity, and promote equality of opportunity and outcome via education and training for their accommodated workers.

I promise you, we are worth it.

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