InEx: A Show About Inclusive Design

by

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Abstract

What does the term "inclusive design" mean to you?

Broadly speaking, the colloquial definition of "inclusive design" is the intersection between "something that looks inclusive" and "something that looks like it was designed." This stands in contrast to the more holistic approach which makes up the Inclusive Design program at OCAD University, whose program is focused from the start on seeking out and empowering marginalized, minoritized and historically underinvested communities through all phases of product design.

The effect of this more superficial interpretation above taking hold is in shaping public perception. Embracing that superficiality by aligning the term to often fundamentally wrong-headed "design *for*" projects acts not only to further marginalize the purported users of these products, but to devalue the work of people trained in equity design, participatory action research and co-design, among other techniques and methodologies. Attention (and resources) flow to simple feel-good stories, at the expense of the more complex reality of inclusion and equity work in design roles: that they take time and effort, and don't fit neatly in PR-friendly boxes.

To address this gap in understanding, as well as the range of constituencies involved in defining, or at least narrowing down, the term "inclusive design," I conducted a series of interviews with six professionals in fields exploring inclusion and equity in design. The resulting conversations showed an expansive set of lived experiences, personal insights into academia and industry, critique into the theory of its inclusive design and how it is claimed, and a look at where we go from here.

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Inclusive Design: a finger pointing to the moon

The late Zen Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki once described his practice of explaining the Dharma, or the teachings of Śakyamuni Buddha, like this:

> "By personal experience it is meant to get at the fact at first hand and not through any intermediary, whatever this may be. Its favourite analogy is: To point at the moon, a finger is needed; but woe to those who take the finger for the moon." (Suzuki, 1949)

Labels are signifiers. They oftentimes exist to trade away fuzzy parts—where one concept ends and another begins, for example—to make way for discussion of a broader topic. But the cost of that tradeoff can be significant. Once something is given a label, it is on its way to being misunderstood.

"Inclusive design" is one such label, and one that is by its nature hard to pin down. Contrasted against the term "Universal Design," as put forward by Ron Mace in the 1980s, the adjective "inclusive" is deliberately softer around the edges. I once attempted to describe the difference in perception between the two terms:

> One way to put a name to this activity is to say that we are going up the mountain — in other words, moving upward is our goal. Another is to refer to reaching the summit — the destination to which we aspire. The former says, in effect, "We are gradually making our way up the hill." The latter says, "We're not done until we get to the top." Either way, the next steps are the same. (May, 2018)

When approaching a shared understanding of a concept that touches multiple disciplines, it is necessary to be in communication with experience from as many disparate perspectives as possible.

Academics have approached inclusion in design out of many disciplines. "The Promise of Empathy: Design, Disability, and Knowing the 'Other'" (Bennett and Rosner, 2019) is a comprehensive critique of the concept of Design Thinking, a technique advocated by design company IDEO which uses "empathy" as one of its steps. This problematic approach and the erasure this effects was also the focus of Liz Jackson's Interaction 19 keynote, "Empathy reifies disability stigmas". (Jackson, 2019)

Supplementing this work, a number of books published since 2017, such as *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (Hamraie, 2017), *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need* (Costanza-Chock, 2020), *Mismatch: How Inclusion Shapes Design* (Holmes, 2018), *Inclusive Design for a Digital World: Designing with Accessibility in Mind* (Gilbert, 2019), and *Extra Bold: A Feminist, Inclusive, Anti-Racist, Non-Binary Field Guide for Graphic Designers* (Lupton et al., 2021), have reached out to the design community to present new ways of framing their responsibilities.

In recent years, a more intersectional approach to inclusive design has taken hold, particularly in large organizations. Google has a "product inclusion and equity" team, and product equity teams have sprouted up at Airbnb, Uber, Visa, Ikea and Adobe, to name a few.[1] These efforts tend to have grown out of accessibility, which has long had product oversight in larger organizations, expanding to address, to echo the Inclusive Design Institute's definition, "ability, language, culture, gender, age, and other forms of human difference" (Inclusive Design Institute, n.d.); or diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) organizations moving to address issues of exclusion at the product level, as a peer effort to hiring and human resources organizations.

Choosing a podcast format

I chose a podcast as a format for these discussions specifically to bring this kind of conversation to an audience outside of academia. Many practitioners of design are no longer affiliated with academic institutions, if they ever were. An academic paper or presentation, then, would keep these interviews from reaching the very people who ought to be familiar with the issues involved in inclusive design.

Ordinarily, one might expect this to be a common part of a university or trade school design program, but unfortunately, formal curricula for equity or inclusion with respect to design or user experience fields are few and far between, and their approaches, often rooted in specific aspects of lived experience such as disability (or more narrowly, sensory disability), can tend to be parochial. For example, many in disability circles, in part owing to a shared legacy with Universal Design, limit the scope to the intersection of accessibility and design, whether consciously or not.

Given that these conversations are germane not only to academia but to the design field writ large, a formalized curriculum suitable for a university course or conference workshop would

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[1] I lead the product equity team at Adobe, which I renamed from "inclusive design" in 2022.

itself be exclusive. Podcasting has a low barrier to entry, with an estimated 120 million monthly listeners in the United States alone. As opposed to online learning sites, podcasts can be played on any number of devices and apps, without a subscription that requires payment, or even disclosure of personal information. And unlike services like YouTube, episodes can be downloaded and shared freely. Podcasts are advantageous for guests, as well. Each interview offers an opportunity to reach new audiences, with little effort. And as a host rather than a researcher, I was able to turn a series of expert interviews into a series of conversations, resulting in a more dialectic and fluid exchange of ideas.

For these reasons, a podcast had several advantages over, for example, a printed series of interviews. The product of these interviews, lightly edited, presents a mixture of academic and industry perspectives, in a more conversational and integrative style than one might find in academic texts or presentations. For design practitioners who are pressed for time, or those in academia looking for a deep dive into these experts' work, this podcast may be useful, and perhaps even entertaining.

Findings

Reflecting on my experience with these interviews, it is my belief that inclusive design as a concept does, in fact, have problems with outreach.

The co-option of inclusive design for superficial activities requires deeper inspection. While the urge to "let a thousand flowers bloom" is ingrained in the practice itself, the fact remains that all of us involved in these recordings could cite "examples" of inclusive design that were anything but. In not limiting ourselves to a common definition across design for what we are addressing, we run the risk of being talked over by better marketers, who are also poorer practitioners.

It is worth airing out some of this dissonance in non-academic circles, since it is there that the lack of discernment is greatest. In my opinion, that fuzziness inherent in the term itself requires some scaffolding.

I would caution strongly against framing inclusive design as concretely as a term like "accessibility." Over the years, the drive to codify accessibility has led to exactly the kind of reductive interpretation inclusive design must strive to avoid, from strict technical interpretations instead of those based in lived experience of disabled users, to certifications of individuals or artifacts as "accessible" based on only one of those interpretations.

It's my opinion that every process or artifact claiming to be based in inclusive design methodologies must answer two questions: *to whom* and *for what?* What communities were engaged in the work, and how was the power to direct the outcome distributed? Was this work a focus group conducted just prior to a product's release, or was this a collaborative environment from the beginning, where those with lived experience were able to throw entire premises or product directions out the window?

Intent is a factor in inclusive design practices, because it is at minimum a signifier of the will to follow a certain set of ethics. However, the real-life *impact* of a given design process or artifact can have the effect of harming the group or groups who were engaged, as well as those who weren't contemplated at all. I can't imagine myself applying the label of "inclusive design" to a health-care app for a chronic disease whose data is fed to an insurer for the purpose of depriving coverage to higher-risk users. Or for that matter, to a more accessible weapons targeting system.

I mentioned earlier the lack of a coordinated process for introducing inclusion and equity work in design curricula.

Finally, product organizations need guidance on how to integrate inclusive design into their processes and corporate governance models. This is new territory for many organizations that are struggling to understand how to address issues of inclusion and equity systemically, rather than investing effectively all of the responsibility with research, design and engineering. This calls for more advanced models for conducting and evaluating the product lifecycle for inclusivity.

Future steps

It is my view that the more conversations like these can be made available to the broadest design audience possible, the better. The cross-pollination of viewpoints on a topic as fundamentally interdisciplinary as inclusive design is rejuvenating and recontextualizing.

I plan to release these episodes to the public at a rate of one per week, starting in June 2022. To increase potential audience, I have made social media cards and "audiograms," short videos featuring captioned audio clips, for guests to share with their networks. It's my goal to attract a large number of listeners (or readers, for those who prefer transcripts) to this show. If I'm successful, that will present the opportunity to continue the series with additional guests.

Discussion of inclusive design, and issues of diversity, inclusion and equity more broadly, needs a constant infusion of voices from a variety of perspectives and lived experiences. The potential to

create platforms for new voices is inexhaustible, and its value accrues directly to the work that we do. If we cannot fully describe the moon ourselves, we must do our best to point it out to others.

Interviewees

Dr. Jutta Treviranus

Jutta Treviranus is the Director of the Inclusive Design Research Centre (IDRC) and professor in the faculty of Design at OCAD University in Toronto. Jutta established the IDRC in 1993 as the nexus of a growing global community that proactively works to ensure that our digitally transformed and globally connected society is designed inclusively. Dr. Treviranus also founded an innovative graduate program in inclusive design at OCAD University. Jutta is credited with developing an inclusive design methodology that has been adopted by large enterprise companies, as well as public sector organizations internationally.

Chancey Fleet

Chancey Fleet is a Brooklyn-based tech educator and activist who identifies as Blind. Chancey is the Assistive Technology Coordinator at the New York Public Library. In that role, she curates accessible technology in the branch, collaborates across the NYPL system to improve equity of access, and coordinates a diverse team of staff and volunteers who provide one-to-one tech coaching and group workshops, free of charge and open to all. Through a 2017 NYPL Innovation grant, she founded and maintains the Dimensions Project, a free open lab for the exploration and creation of accessible images, models and data representations through tactile graphics, 3d models and nonvisual approaches to coding, CAD and "visual" arts. Chancey is a 2018-19 Data & Society Fellow and current Affiliate-in-Residence whose writing, organizing and advocacy aims to catalyze critical inquiry into how cloud-connected accessibility tools benefit and harm, empower and expose communities of disability. Chancey was recognized as a 2017 Library Journal Mover and Shaker. She currently serves as president of the NFB's Assistive Technology Trainers' Division, a board member of the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and a member of New York State's Regents' Advisory Council on Libraries.

Timothy Bardlavens

Timothy Bardlavens is chaotic good in its purest form. He is a Gay, Black man from the Carolinas, the youngest son of a single mother and everything institutional trauma and oppression says you

cannot be or become. He is a Design Leader, a Cultural Strategist, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) specialist, a Fellowship Co-Founder, a writer and International Speaker & Facilitator.

Over the past decade, he has also built and scaled teams, set product vision and strategy for Zillow, Microsoft, Capital One and others. Currently a Sr. Manager of Product Design at Meta, Timothy leads Problems & Ecosystem within Central integrity—who's missions are to create scalable solutions to reduce harm, abuse, and misinformation while also increasing peoples' voice and equitable outcomes across the family of apps (i.e. Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, WhatsApp & Metaverse) for over 3.6 billion people around the world. Previously, he led Community Relevance and Culture in Facebook App—whose mission is to create experiences that enable culture to emerge and thrive on Facebook.

Dr. Aimi Hamraie

Aimi Hamraie (they/them) is Associate Professor of Medicine, Health, & Society and American Studies at Vanderbilt University, and director of the Critical Design Lab. Trained as a feminist scholar, Hamraie's interdisciplinary research spans critical disability studies, science and technology studies, critical design and urbanism, critical race theory, and the environmental humanities. They are author of *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (Hamraie, 2017) and host of the Contra* podcast(n.d.) on disability and design. With Kelly Fritsch, Mara Mills, and David Serlin, Hamraie co-edited a special issue of Catalyst: feminism theory technoscience on "Crip Technoscience." Hamraie's research is funded by the Social Science Research Council, the Smithsonian Institution, the Mellon Foundation, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Arts, and the National Humanities Alliance. They are quoted by the New York Times, the Chronicle of Higher Education, National Public Radio, the History Channel, the Huffington Post, Art News, and others.

Sadie Red Wing

Sadie Red Wing is a Lakota graphic designer and advocate from the Spirit Lake Nation of Fort Totten, North Dakota.

Red Wing earned her BFA in New Media Arts and Interactive Design at the Institute of American Indian Arts. She received her Masters of Graphic Design from North Carolina State University. Her research on cultural revitalization through design tools and strategies created a new demand for tribal competence in graphic design research.

Red Wing urges Native American graphic designers to express visual sovereignty in their design work, as well as encourages academia to include an indigenous perspective in design curriculum. Currently, Red Wing works as the Assistant Director of the Native Student Programs at the University of Redlands where she supports and provides resources to indigenous students during their journey through higher education. Her work has been featured on AIGA's Eye on Design: "Why Can't the U.S. Decolonize Its Design Education?" (2017) and Communication Arts: "Decolonizing Native American Design" (2017).

Joshua Halstead

Joshua A. Halstead is a scholar working at the intersection of critical theory, design studies, and critical access studies. A recognized contributor to disability design discourse, his primary project is that of conjoining aesthetics and access to provoke questions about the conditions and possibilities of participation. Halstead has been an invited lecturer in academic and professional settings—from Stanford to Google—and is co-author of *Extra Bold: A Feminist, Inclusive, Anti-Racist, Non-Binary Field Guide for Graphic Designers* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2021). He is an Assistant Professor at ArtCenter College of Design and Adjunct faculty at California College of the Arts.

Production Notes

Interviews were conducted between February and April, 2022. I used Zencastr, a web-based podcasting platform that enables both ends of the conversation to be recorded locally, and saved onto a cloud service. This increased the sound quality dramatically, gave me two separate channels to mix together, and ensured that no audio would be lost due to transient network problems.

Audio editing was conducted first in Adobe Audition, and content editing and transcription were done in Descript. Episodes were released as 96kbps MP3 audio, excerpts were built as captioned videos, and transcripts were made available as HTML. I created a number of visual assets in Adobe Illustrator for branding and social media outreach.

Inclusivity Considerations

The production of the InEx podcast itself incorporated the following inclusivity practices:

- Invited participants reflected a range of gender, race, sexuality, age, and disability identity, as well as academic background and career path. Regrettably, though no invited participant declined, four who would have contributed substantially to its diversity were unable to sit down with me in time for the MRP deadline. Further diversifying the voices highlighted remains a goal, should this series continue beyond the scope of the MRP interviews.

- All participants were invited to specify how they were to be compensated for the interview time, and for the right to release a recording that contained it. I proposed cash, value in kind, a donation to the nonprofit of the interviewee's choice, or a counterproposal of their choosing. One participant chose to invite me to be a guest on a future podcast of theirs; the others are selecting a donation, or have refused compensation.

- Participants received a form asking several questions relating to their identity, and necessary accommodations. (This form is found in the appendix.) These included:
  - personal pronouns
  - how to address them, including pronunciation and honorific titles
  - an open-ended question about how they identify, prompted by giving my own as an example
  - the option to specify which topics (including aspects of their stated identity) we must or must *not* discuss; and
  - an open-ended question about accessibility requirements.

- All accessibility requirements were addressed prior to recording.

- After recording, participants received both the draft audio and an accompanying transcript via email, and were given time to review the contents before the final mix.

- All recordings included land acknowledgments citing the ancestral territories where OCAD U, my interviewee and I were situated.

- Social media cards with accompanying alt text and video cards featuring captioned audio were made available to participants for their own publicity.

- Show notes feature direct links to works that are referenced.

- Transcripts are released simultaneously with new episodes, and the website where they may be found is mentioned in each episode and linked to from show notes. They can be accessed in the Captivate.fm player on the site, read along with the audio via the Descript

interactive transcript, displayed directly in some podcast players, or downloaded in
multiple text formats from the inex.show website.

- The Captivate.fm player is keyboard accessible and usable with assistive technology.
- Interviews were scrubbed of disfluencies (e.g., "um," "uh," "you know"), long silences, and
other verbal tics or noises that may make it harder for listeners or readers to understand.
- All published content is released under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International
license, one of the more permissive content licenses available.

REB Considerations

Article 2.2 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement reads, in part:

> REB review is(...) not required where research uses exclusively information in the public
> domain that may contain identifiable information, and for which there is no reasonable
> expectation of privacy. For example, identifiable information may be disseminated in the
> public domain through print or electronic publications; film, audio or digital recordings;
> press accounts; official publications of private or public institutions; artistic installations,
> exhibitions or literary events freely open to the public; or publications accessible in public
> libraries. Research that is non-intrusive, does not involve direct interaction between the
> researcher and individuals through the Internet, and where there is no expectation of
> privacy does not require REB review. REB review is not required for research that relies
> exclusively on cyber-material, such as documents, records, performances, online archival
> materials, or published third party interviews to which the public is given uncontrolled
> access on the Internet and for which there is no expectation of privacy.

> Exemption from REB review for this type of information is based on the information being
> available in the public domain, and that the individuals to whom the information refers
> have no reasonable expectation of privacy. Information in the public domain may,
> however, be subject to copyright and/or intellectual property rights protections or
> dissemination restrictions imposed by the legal entity controlling the information.
> (Government of Canada, 2019)

This MRP and its participation meet the above criteria in the following ways:

- The podcast itself is a series of audio recordings that are "freely open to the public."

- Participants were approached under the explicit condition that the material they share would be made public, subject to their own editorial input. Each participant agreed expressly to be interviewed with that intent.
- Participants are all professionals in academia, industry or library sciences, and the interviews speak directly to their experiences as such. Each has substantial public speaking expertise and many have published works that is directly relevant. It would follow, then, that "the individuals to whom the information refers have no reasonable expectation of privacy."

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Appendix A – Episode 1: Interview with Jutta Treviranus

[00:00:00] **Matt May:** This is InEx, a show about inclusive design. I'm your host, Matt May. In this episode:

[00:00:09] **Jutta Treviranus:** It's such hubris to think that we can ever know exactly what somebody else is feeling and how they're going to react. And anything that we do to persuade ourselves that's the case I think is really dangerous. We need to come at this with humility, with a recognition that the only person that has expertise about their own experience is the person that's experiencing it.

[00:00:40] **Matt May:** A conversation with Jutta Treviranus.

Welcome to InEx. I'd like to start by introducing myself and what this is all about. A little over two years ago, I applied to the master's program in inclusive design at OCAD University. The reason I made this decision to go back to school is my first guest, my mentor of two decades, and my master's advisor, Jutta Treviranus.

Without her guidance and support, I would never have made my way to OCAD, where I've had the chance to approach inclusive design from the side of academia, to compliment my experience working in accessibility and inclusive design in the technology field.

And, full disclosure. In 2017, I started the inclusive design practice at Adobe, where I've been working for the last 15 years. But this podcast is not sponsored, endorsed, reviewed, or edited by Adobe. And I do my best not to talk about my work life during these interviews.

This podcast is my major research project, in partial completion of the Master of Design in Inclusive Design at OCAD University. I've chosen a podcast is my format for a series of interviews with people I respect in and around the field of inclusion.

I named this series InEx, because it's made up of interviews with experts about inclusion and exclusion. I've worked to make these interviews as inclusive as possible for my interviewees and

for you, the audience. If you prefer to read your podcasts rather than listen to them, full transcripts are available at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show.

I worked with my interviewees to make the interviews available under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. So you're free to share this podcast in any way you like. Please credit InEx and the guest, if you do. Now, let me introduce you to Jutta.

It is my great pleasure to get to sit down with my friend and my mentor of 20 years, Jutta Treviranus. Jutta is the director of the Inclusive Design Research Centre and professor in the faculty of design at OCAD University. Jutta established the IDRC in 1993, as the nexus of a global growing community that proactively works to ensure that our digitally transformed and globally connected society is designed inclusively.

Dr. Treviranus has also founded an innovative graduate program in inclusive design at OCAD University where I am a student and Jutta is my advisor. Jutta is credited with developing an inclusive design methodology that has been adopted by large enterprise companies, as well as public sector organizations internationally.

And thank you, Jutta, for coming and joining me for this interview.

[00:03:05] **Jutta Treviranus:** Oh, it's a pleasure.

[00:03:08] **Matt May:** First I want to start with the land acknowledgment: OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Huron-Wendat, and I am presently on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Duwamish and Coast Salish Peoples, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we stand and create.

So apart from the bio introduction, I want to get a little bit more into sort of how this came to you. How your career unfolded, if you will.

[00:03:38] **Jutta Treviranus:** How did I get into this? And I've told a number of different introductions to that. And I keep reflecting on, when did this all start? And every time I tell it, I go further back. But...

[00:03:52] **Matt May:** I have the same problem, actually.

[00:03:56] **Jutta Treviranus:** Because there's so many different original commitments to ideas that are somewhat counter to what is happening at the moment. Periods where I think, oh my goodness, this isn't right. And we have to do something about it or is this really how we want to proceed? And isn't there a better way. And then also, oh my, I look at the opportunity or the possibility that this brings about. So I think I've been always enthralled with the opportunity about that difference brings, and diversity.

And variety and flux and change. I have a farmer background. My father was a horticulturalist. I have within my family someone that first coined the term botany. And so our entire family has always thought about just how wonderful diversity is and what a differentiation and the serendipity and dynamic resilience within diversity.

But at what point did this become part of my career, and a very different part of my career than my dad or, my great grandparents, et cetera, was, I guess when I first graduated from my undergrad and I was working with, or had the opportunity to work with 12 people who had various constraints and disabilities that would make it difficult to participate in post-secondary education. And I was told, figure out how these 12 students could participate in post-secondary education.

And by coincidence, it happened to be also the emergence of personal computers. So this was late seventies, early eighties, and there had been these massive things, but all of a sudden computers were things that could be personal. That could be about you, that could be devices that you would use yourself.

And so I saw them as an amazing translation device. What look at how we could use these things to take something that's visual, turn it into auditory, take an action that you can control and turn it into a whole range of things that you need to control something. Take something that is in

audio and turn it into visual, et cetera. And so I started to play with these personal computers and it was a very sort of skunkworks time because you could basically just unplug the motherboard, the display, you could unplug the keyboard and you could mess with it.

And we did things that even to this day, I don't think have been replicated. And in that is the story of how this excitement and opportunity became also an understanding of the risk and how things go the wrong way. And don't turn out the way that you wanted. So that's been the story since that time is just, wow.

Look at the amazing possibilities and opportunities that the stuff brings. And then also, oh my, look at the risks and, oh dear, look at how it's completely gone off course, and we haven't taken it where we want to take it, or we think it should be taken.

[00:07:25] **Matt May:** We're going to get into where it's going later on. I think that's going to be fascinating, but I want to talk about the formation of the IDRC. I think it was the ATRC, what it started in the University of Toronto.

And I think that connects with what you were talking about with the capabilities of the technology evolving.

[00:07:44] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah. So I was recruited to the University of Toronto and what I was asked to do, or the job that I took was supposed to create a accessible computer lab and they had dozens of computer labs. And so they wanted one accessible one, which, and this was in 1993 and I thought this is all wrong. So I took the job, but then I went to the VP of academic computing or computing at the time, and said, no, this is not what I want to do.

I want to create a research lab that would ensure that all labs are going to be accessible. I don't want the students within U of T to have to come to one place just because they require an alternative access system. But the right at the beginning, I wanted to call it the Inclusive Design Research Centre, but because the university had already come up with the name, the Adaptive Technology Resource Centre, because it was intended to be a resource center, not a research center, we had to stick with that name, but we right from the beginning, were calling it inclusive design. But under the name of the center, the ATRC.

[00:09:01] **Matt May:** And so this is actually where our paths cross, because at the time you're working at U of T, I had just gotten a job at the World Wide Web Consortium, in the Web Accessibility Initiative as a specialist there.

And I was the staff contact for your working group. So we were working on the Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines, and you had already done the 1.0 version. And so anyway, I come to Toronto for my first trip as I don't even remember how young I was. It was in my twenties. And we just start talking about the task at hand, and then you, one day took me over to Ryerson University and showed me a demo of PEBBLES, I think it was. It was a robot that was for tele learning or distance learning.

So if you had a student that couldn't physically attend class, they could have an avatar presence, like a rolling robot with a picture of their face. And it just, it stuns me because here we are 20 years later and it actually is happening, that there's this idea of remote presence, not just Zoom meetings, but of there being a physical presence for people in the room.

And so what that taught me is that these things actually do happen, but they do take time. What else do you think that you've seen over the last 20 years in just terms of the evolution of inclusive design, and maybe going from it being an engineering driven thing to a design driven thing.

[00:10:30] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah. And I've always been somewhat troubled by the thought of applying engineering here because engineering is so much about complicated systems and this idea of building blocks, which you stack one on top of the other. It's very, it's a very linear thinking process. I've been much more enamored of an organic process, where you can't predict the whole thing, you can't make it happen and build it. You are basically growing it to some extent, but the other thing to your point about things happening, taking time to happen. I've seen things go in waves.

Not only did we have that early exploration and tele presence and it's a technology we were working with. This was pre-internet video conferencing right before internet audio. We were dealing with these crazy difficult clunky networks that took so much more fiddling and working with and were not ubiquitous. So the explorations, it wasn't the field wasn't ready yet at the time, but certainly the ideas stuck. And we had, I think, in that pre time when the reality isn't yet there,

you can imagine more, you're not as constrained by the reality. That there is a fresh field. So we thought about a whole range of things that, although the field has advanced so tremendously and so many more things are possible, we played with things like actually navigating your avatar or your physical robot through the environment raising your hand and physically within the representative of your presence within the classroom actually having an embodiment of yourself.

Yeah. And in the remote space and how you would project your identity and your character upon that embodiment. We also. We're really cognizant of the diversity of representations that you would want, so that the robot for the kids, that it was this yellow blob, this cute yellow blob, the same height as the kids. For the high school students, it was a hanger that you could hang your clothes on and that you could move your face. We were really concerned about eye contact. How do you create that sense of eye contact, and that still hasn't really been addressed. But we're not concerned with that anymore for some reason, but I still think it's a really critical piece of actually feeling like you're next to somebody and you're actually talking to somebody.

So that was telepresence, but similarly, we played with early versions of AR, VR. And I wrote a very naive, very sort of optimistic article for MIT telepresence way back then, where I imagined all sorts of things in AR and VR. And then we had this project called "Adding feeling, touch and equal access to distance education", where we created a haptic experience, a haptic audio speech experience that really hasn't been replicated either.

We took a grade 4 geography text, and we added haptic artifacts, all sorts of haptic effects. Real world sounds, three-dimensional real world sounds, and then speech audio to provide the information that you would get in a grade 4 text, if you could see it. And we had things like latitude and longitude lines were elastics, felt like elastics. Cities had a particular artifact that you could feel. And as you got closer to them, the sound, the ambient sound of a city would increase. When you got to it, there would be a gravity well around these artifacts. When you got to it, you could hit a key and find out the population and a whole bunch of other things.

You could feel the direction of the river by the waves. We played with all sorts of possibilities. And it's funny to think that haptics is actually one of the last things, now that we're at a place

where AR, VR, XR are so prevalent and so much more possible, that it's not something that's being explored.

[00:15:01] **Matt May:** Or if it is really the same territory, dredged back up again. And probably the classic example of that is the sign language gloves.

[00:15:11] **Jutta Treviranus:** Right?

[00:15:12] **Matt May:** And the evolution of that thing where the, there, it used to be, I think the first example that I saw was an old Nintendo Power Glove, like something built in 1985.

And there was this idea of that doing this let you do finger spelling. It's always fresh territory for somebody that discovers this, that they're convinced that they're the first people that have ever done it. And then comes the BuzzFeed or the Now This story about it.

And everybody that's been working in this space for all of this time, including, especially deaf activists, deaf designers that have been in this space, are like, this has been done. This doesn't meet our needs at all. It's just an annoyance, and it draws so much attention for this. And then it becomes called inclusive design, right?

[00:15:58] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah, or the exoskeleton. And this is going to, that walking, some sort of semblance of walking is really what you want rather than getting from place to place. Or the other one that is every PhD in engineering. I don't know how many hours the EEG, the, we're going to read your brainwaves and that's how well, if you can't communicate this, how you're going to communicate. Yeah.

[00:16:23] **Matt May:** We talked about this demo that I saw at a CSUN many years ago, the CSUN conference, a big accessibility industry conference, where there was a demo where you put pads on your forehead and then tried to make a ball bounce up. And they made a game about that called Mind Flex. It's the same idea. But like you keep coming back to these ideas of, if we could only do this.

[00:16:46] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah.

[00:16:46] **Matt May:** If we could make exoskeletons or wheelchairs that can climb stairs or whatever, that suddenly the world would open up.

[00:16:55] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah. And the myth behind that, the craziness behind that, is that if we could fix the person then this whole thing, and which is why I insist that inclusive design is not about fixing the person. It's about fixing the environment.

And in fact, that diversity that we find amongst people is actually really valuable and something that we shouldn't get rid of. Because there, going down that path, we end up in monocultures. We end up with the designer baby. We end up with all the scary things that is going to be our demise as a society, as a human species.

[00:17:35] **Matt May:** Yeah, and it, there are so many threads to tug at here. So I actually want to take a break here and then we can get back into this in the next segment, because there are so many ideas with this terminology that I want to unpack a little bit so that people really understand what it is that the IDRC, that OCAD U talks about when they're talking about inclusive design. So we'll take a short break and we'll come back with Jutta Treviranus.

[00:18:03] **Jutta Treviranus:** Great.

[00:18:03] **Matt May:** InEx is a major research project by me, Matt May, as part of the master of design degree program at OCAD University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Episodes and transcripts of this podcast can be found at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. Follow InEx on Twitter at @inexpodcast.

And we're back with Jutta Treviranus. And I wanted to get into sort of the defining concepts, if not terms behind inclusive design and the capital I capital letter inclusive design, and and I think now we'll be going to just use it to call as a term of art inclusive design has this as this definition. First, I want to talk about universal design. So there's this, this movement that came out of architecture.

Ron Mace was a professor at North Carolina State had this concept with seven principles of universal design that was applied in the field of architecture, and was adapted, has evolved out of

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that. I wrote a book with Wendy Chisholm called Universal Design for Web Applications that tried to associate the two concepts.

And I've distanced myself a little bit from universal design, but I want you to, I want you to talk about your perceptions about this and we can see where these two concepts differ or how they contrast against one another.

[00:19:28] **Jutta Treviranus:** Sure. So I'm very much in support of the concepts of universal design. It came out of architecture and it came out of industrial design. And so I, when digital systems and networks and less static structures came about, I thought, oh, here's an opportunity to go further. Because the thing that troubled me about universal design was this need for a one size fits all approach.

Within architecture, within industrial design, there are constraints that make it very difficult to address the real diversity and difference that we have and the variability within the person as well. So I thought, oh, with digital systems, with networks, with the resource pooling that we have, here's an opportunity to actually create one size fits one, not to deny our diversity, not to create compromises for people that are not addressed or who can't be addressed with a one size fits all design.

The other thing that always worried me was that universal design, if we have to find a system, or if we have to land upon a single design, then who's going to make the compromises? It's the people that are in the minority that are the outliers.

Because there's so many rational reasons why someone will say does this deserve the cost investment? Does this deserve the time that we take? If you do it this way, then what about all these other people who needed a different way? That is why I was so optimistic about digital systems.

[00:21:13] **Matt May:** And still, one of the problems that, that evolved with me about it, about universal design as a term, what ended up happening was that there was this race to the singularity, that there was this one thing that everybody is going to use.

And one of the things that we talk about in the program was the bell curve, of here's this distribution standard distribution of human capability, if you will. And that we're only really focused on this level and up. And so therefore, if you need to adapt, then you like, this is something that's bestowed upon you. Be grateful that this is something that was made for you, rather than there being a dialogue between somebody who's being left out and what they consider quote unquote, the core user.

And that inclusive design kind of flips that around, right? It requires the participation and the consent of the people that are most marginalized. It centers the needs of the people, instead of just assuming that everyone is by default accommodated and anybody else is quote unquote extra work.

[00:22:19] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah. And you talk about the bell curve, but the bell curve is such a flattening of requirements and its primary use is within education.

And what it seems to promote is this notion as well, that everything is on the same scale. So in my use of data, I've been more looking at it in three dimensions as the normal distribution and what I call the human starburst, because there are so many facets in which we differ and so many facets that need to be considered when we consider a design.

But you're right. There are these completely unconscious, completely entrenched ways of thinking. About these spectrum of people and how we make decisions and how we make choices, and who needs to be considered, and the hierarchy of that consideration.

I've been talking recently about this idea of ending the hierarchy of compromise. You were just talking about the notion to say be happy with what you get, that in fact the people that should be compromising are the people that currently are excluded as opposed to the people that are currently well served by the current designs.

And I also talk about the hierarchy of justification, that individuals that are currently excluded are, have such a burden of justifying why they need to be included. The individuals that are currently included or who are well-served by the designs, can rely on saying things like, that's just the way we do things. This is our standard procedure. This is the way things are done. All of those

tropes that don't allow thoughtfulness and a realization that we are in fact, creating systems that are not good for anybody, but that's another part of this. Who should we be considering if we want to create systems that benefit everyone.

[00:24:26] **Matt May:** Okay. You said systems, and now I want to dig into that piece of this, because one thing that I've, that I found them on the people that I think really inclusive design has resonated with is this idea of systems and system theory. That especially if you came up as an advocate, and you've seen how difficult it is to make even the smallest amount of progress, that you do one thing, and you get to this destination, and I've talked about this as sand castles, you do this thing, you turn around, it gets washed away. And to think about how. Exclusive mindset establishes itself in a system, not just in the creation of a company or something like that, but the culture from which the people come from that create the company, all of those things are factors in the design of a product. And what do you think about the, how inclusive design sort of juxtaposes with the systems thinking?

[00:25:31] **Jutta Treviranus:** Inclusive design is intervention in a complex adaptive system. It's all about culture change. It isn't about solutions or fixes. Most of what we work on, or we consider the challenges we're trying to address cannot be fixed. They can't be solved. People change, the environment changes. If you create something that is supposedly an inclusive design or that you see as an inclusive design and you've changed the culture sufficiently that it can be adapted by whoever is the intended beneficiary, if you don't think about what it's nested in, then there will be a friction point at whatever point you haven't actually considered the relation with people around you.

The simple way I try to talk about it is, say you create a wonderful inclusive curriculum for a student. It's not going to work unless the teacher's familiar with it, supports it, understands why the teacher's going to be in difficulty. If the principal or the school as a whole doesn't understand, the principal and the school is going to be in trouble if the school board, et cetera. And then the department of ed, those are all nested. The parents have an influence, the funders, the commercial entities that provide the products, people, all of those need to be taken into consideration before that child that requires something that is more inclusive than what is generally offered, can actually realize the benefits and before the benefit of what they're using can

be seen by the rest of the class, and the rest of the system that they're nested in. So that's the negative part of it.

The positive part about it is that initial inclusive design, that small intervention and culture change, can create this ripple effect where it doesn't only benefit the students, that was the originator of the challenge, but it can ripple throughout an entire school system and then perhaps even an entire country and around the world.

So, yes, we're intervening in complex adaptive systems. And therein is the huge challenge and difficulty, but therein is also the opportunity and the amazing benefit that we can derive from inclusive design.

[00:27:55] **Matt May:** So this is kind of where I contrast that idea of inclusive design as the term of art that we're talking about and inclusive design, meaning anything that someone can conceive of that is part inclusion and part design.

A lot of these are what gets the most attention because it's usually people that, that are thinking about these home run swings, if you will. The one big thing that's going to solve everything. That everything will now go through this one solution. I think one of the hallmarks of that is what I call the one and done, right?

You have this one project and we're going to do this. And I see this in so many different products. We're going to do an accessibility sprint. We're going to talk about this one specific issue, and then we're going to solve it and it's going to be done. And it's hard to say, this is a marathon. This is something that you would need to keep doing. But when all the attention is going to these big moonshot things that you look six months later at the thing that was on Buzzfeed, or Now This or something like that, and it turns out it was just somebody's master's project. It was somebody's PhD. And now they just work at some big company doing something completely unrelated. You have so much potential in this system to do dramatic change, but obviously those superficial kinds of works are going to be maximized for marketing value, but aren't going to do anything meaningful in the greater context.

[00:29:32] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah. And I so agree with that. We've dropped solution and fix from our language because these are not fixable problems. Frequently inclusive design is seen as just a version of Design Thinking because it's design for good. And there are a whole bunch of virtuous design sprints related to design thinking, but design thinking is still in the thralls of that competitive, majority rules, winning, best solution process.

So the design (thinking) squiggle, it iterates towards this one winning design based upon a whole set of iterations of competitive processes, where people supposedly reach consensus. And I'm not attempting to denigrate design thinking, but inclusive design is not about that. It's about creating a system that can address as a continuously expand (ing) diversity of requirements that are out there.

So creating a system that is adaptive, and also within that is embedded this recognition that we always need to act ask, "who is missing?" That people's needs change. That what we need is a system that can react, can be dynamically resilient to the things that reveal themselves, the way that people change, the people we realize have not been part of, or have not been included.

So just as there is no fix, and there's no solution, there is also not a final sort of certified, accessible for all inclusive design. The one thing that really bugs me about those moonshots that are supposedly inclusive designs, is that there's also this conception that you can scale by formulaic replication.

You've created this wonderful life-transforming solution to all of our accessibility challenges or whatever. And now we scale it. And scaling means that you follow exactly these steps. Again, we are then not recognizing diversity. We're not recognizing human difference and variability, and we're not preparing ourselves for the changes that are happening in our environment.

It's the opposite of what I see as inclusive design. There is a huge difference between some of the popular conceptions of what is inclusive design or what people see as the same as inclusive design and our notion of inclusive design being designing for difference, variability, complexity. Designing with the people that have the greatest difficulty or are currently excluded from the designs.

And in fact, frequently, design by those individuals, supporting those individuals in designing and in arriving at the systems that will best serve them. Which of course, that's another piece of inclusive design. We're not experts, we're not professionals in that sense that we know better, that we know what people need, that we understand exactly what will work and what will not work for you.

It's a process of enabling people to understand their own diversity and difference and become experts in their own requirements. And to constantly recognize that the expertise is with lived experience.

[00:33:24] **Matt May:** And I think that's the part that ends up being missing in a lot of these, because that idea of reaching out to somebody whose lived experiences, you don't know, you don't understand who may be using technology in a completely different way from you, is an expression of you not knowing, right? You're unaware, you're ignorant of this difference. And that tends to be a cause for people to close up. And I've found so many times that when you pull out of people why they're not doing these processes, it's that they don't want to feel ignorant about the situation. They're uncomfortable about it.

And so they might even raise process points, rather than acknowledge that they have things to learn about the thing that they spend their entire lives doing. And I think what happens with design thinking is that it papers over that, that the designer is still is the actor in this scenario, the doer. And then the users are the done to, right? They're the receivers of this thing that you bestow upon them. And I blame empathy training for that. The idea of marketing and commoditizing the concept of empathy.

Cognitive empathy, in a clinical term, I think is a beneficial thing, but it's also in the eye of the beholder, and the idea that you can think for, or on behalf of somebody without actually participating with them, ends up being a blocker to this. And it ends up creating a lot of the, Liz Jackson has termed them disability dongles, this idea of the tool that adapts a person to the environment and not the other way around.

And I kind of wonder, is there any use for that concept of empathy in this, or do we have to throw that away and go onto some to some other framing in order for this to start from a fair, more equitable place?

[00:35:20] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah. And in addition to the empathy exercises, they, the notion of persona as well, and even edge personas and simulation. Another thing that comes up a lot.

It's such hubris to think that we can ever know exactly what somebody else is feeling and how they're going to react. And anything that we do to persuade ourselves that's the case I think is really dangerous. We need to come at this with humility, with a recognition that the only person that has expertise about their own experience is the person that's experiencing it. Even if there were huge similarities, I have the same disability, or I come from the same place. I speak the same language. It's not going to be the same.

You were asking, is there something, is there value in empathy? And yes, of course there is. There's value in recognizing the common needs, the common or the commonality, the humanness, within each of us. But we need to do that with humility and with the recognition that we don't know. And what we feel, what we know, what we expect is not the same thing.

[00:36:38] **Matt May:** The reading that is clicking with me is the idea of agonist design. That you're building something, as people are basically chipping away at it, like trying to do the opposite, particularly in like political situations.

[00:36:50] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah. But this speaks to empathy.

So if you're going to design a country, a regime, then you should design it, not knowing whether you're going to be the pauper, or the least powerful, or the most powerful. But I think there is definitely a value in empathy, as long as that empathy comes with humility. And if we can use empathy and the stories, the real stories of people who are facing challenges at the moment to unseat people from their presumptions and assumptions. Whatever we can do to extend somebody's imagination of what the possibilities are for life and possibilities of people's existence is good.

The minute people think that actually gives them expertise or knowledge about what somebody else is feeling, what somebody else is experiencing is dangerous to a large extent.

[00:37:56] **Matt May:** Yeah. There's also this idea of, experiencing one aspect of exclusion is transferable, that there's a piece of it. This is something that over my career, just pieces of the rest of my life come into me. And I understand that I experienced exclusion in the educational environment that was related to my ADHD. That I was always kicked out of classes. I was put in detention. I was always in academic trouble in one sense or another. That was actually my first experience in accessibility spaces, which was, why don't you adapt to us? Why don't we change the way that you that you do things in order to fit the situation. But then I come into accessibility and think that it was just out of the goodness of my heart. That was how it resonated with me. It took a while to put the pieces together of, I have experienced what it's like to not be a participant in this ecosystem.

But that only goes so far. There are lots of great self advocates who can push for inclusion only for themselves, but at the expense of other people. And I think that there's this other level of advocacy where it's, okay, you understand what this is because you have been in a situation that doesn't that doesn't make you feel like you're participating equitably. But you use that, with the skills that you have to help to amplify others that are in the same situation.

[00:39:18] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah. We're at a point at the moment, within the evolution of the field where there is cachet in having lived experience, which is lovely. It's lovely that we've come to this point, that we recognize that, oh, our own lived experience is something of value, and lived experience of having gone through the challenges and struggles that exclusion has created.

But I, I don't want people to think that's the only reason or the value within inclusive design, or that that's the only motivation. Because, you have experience of struggle, of exclusion, of systems that don't work. I truly believe that many of the crises that we have at the moment, and many of the ways in which our society seems to have gone sideways and is quickly accelerating towards some sort of major extinction or disaster has to do with not attending to difference diversity, not understanding complexity and that moving forward with the type of version or disruption or ending that inclusive design proposes is something that will benefit everybody.

It's not just about a group of individuals who have been wronged, where things need to be righted. Much deeper than that, it is about how are we as a society going to live, survive, and in wronging, in the wrong that we've done, and in the practices of the wrongs, lies everybody's demise, to some extent. It is a complex adaptive system by virtue of doing these wrongs of excluding people about not valuing our differences. In the xenophobia, in the disparities that are there in the sort of linear thinking, the monocausality, all of those things that are not part of inclusive design, but that inclusive design is trying to unseat. There also lie many of the crises and the troubles that we have got ourselves into.

[00:41:43] **Matt May:** All right. I'm going to pause here. We're going to get into the troubles and then probably in the last 15, 20 minutes, we're going to solve them all, but we'll take a pause right here and then we'll just jump right into it.

On the next episode of InEx:

[00:42:00] **Chancey Fleet:** Graphics were something that I received. They were not something that I requested or chose. They were curated for me by textbook publishers and other sighted folks. There was never a direct path from my curiosity to an image being under my fingers.

[00:42:23] **Matt May:** A conversation with Chancey Fleet.

Okay. We're back. And we want to get into the part of the discussion, as you were talking about, the forms of exclusion and the history that we work with, that's an important aspect of this. And to start from that, I think that it's entirely fair to say that in terms of design as a practice, that the history of it is shaped, just even in the last century, it's shaped enormously by upper-class white men in North America and Europe. Those have been the traditional defaults. And we can add in abled, heterosexual, cisgender to the mix.

A part of the idea of why inclusive design. And this is one of the things that I think is evolving more recently. Inclusive design is a how, it's a technique, it's a methodology, but you need a *why*. You need a reason to be doing that. And that to me is equity. Of establishing a place where everybody has has a stake, and everybody has contributed equally to the outcome of that.

And going back to the adaptation of your program into the IDRC that you had moved from the idea of moved from disability into, in the definition, all forms of human difference, and that kind of opens up multiple sets of exclusion to discuss. And there are, including some of the people that were talking within this series, experts from other lived experiences, that also have needs that are not themselves expressed in the products. And thinking about LGBTQ community, things like deadnaming people in software applications, of gender identity, of the representation by race and gender in the workplace, in leadership, in imagery that we create.

This idea of inclusive design is not just limited to disability. And I want to talk about how does that expand? How do design practitioners start to understand where they came from, where the things that they learned are, and what the biases are that are already entrenched in the work that they've created, the artifacts that they use on a regular basis so that they can start disassembling them.

[00:45:00] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah, there's so much I can say about that. The premise that I've always throughout my career, that has grounded me, that I am persuaded of, is that diversity is our greatest asset. We're not using diversity here. I don't know why we missed it in terms of the human realm. We as economists, despite capitalism, think about diversification of markets, biologists, and most people that think about animals at all or the ecosystem think about diversification.

We fight against extinction. Every child knows which animals are threatened with extinction. And yet exactly those same people are the people who are in essence promoting what can be called epistemicide, or the killing of ways of knowing. We're winnowing down the diversity within our society, within our systems.

So the premise is that diversity is our greatest asset and inclusion is our biggest challenge. And that's what has been driving me for the longest time. And diversity, I hate actually the categories or boundaries of that diversity, because it is so entangled and there are so many different forms, and it's that lovely mix of things, as opposed to, I belong in this box here. And by belonging in the box, these are the assumptions, presumptions you can make about me. When I think about what is diversity or what's human difference, I think it's this rich interplay of so many different facets of

everybody's identity. And it's that interplay that is something that is, I think we'll reap the greatest rewards in terms of this asset.

Disability too. What is disability that the difficulty, but also the beauty of it is that there is really no real definition. People keep trying to capture it, but it's just different. It's sufficient difference from the norm that things aren't designed for you. And it can be seen as a strength, and it can be seen as a problem. I think in terms of disability as something that is a problem, there are far greater things than we see that are a problem than the things that we classify as within the formal classification of disability, if there are such things. So the fact that disability is not really defined that we cannot create boundaries to it, that we can't box it in, I think is one of the reasons why it is frequently what I go to when I talk about the need for inclusion and the benefits of inclusion because the other I guess justice seeking groups have very well-defined, here's who belongs here. Here's who's in the club. Here's who's not in the club. Or here is the distinction between someone that has this identity and somebody that doesn't. But that can't be there in terms of disability, unless it's self identification as having a disability, but the problems and the exclusions that come with it are many people, experiences who don't identify.

And the benefits extend well beyond the group. Yes. The entrenched thinking that we have that the white male cisgender dilemma, that is who has authored this mess that we're currently in and who for whatever reason continues to be in power and still has the ability to make the decisions and influence the decisions. What is so infuriating about that is that it's associated with innovation, it's associated with progress, it's associated with all of these sort of powerful influences still. But in fact, those same mindsets that are promoted by the people in power are so ancient and so old. And so damaging.

We're still under the influence of the industrial revolution, the idea of the average person and the sacredness of being within a particular norm the notion of survival of the fittest, the Dewey decimal system with categorization, the 80/20 rule with the quick wins and the quick profit that needs to be there. And even the things that are supposed to be these Inclusion sprints or designs for good are all about competing and survival of the fittest still.

[00:49:55] **Matt May:** Yeah. Since you were talking about the Dewey decimal system, the thing that just blew my mind about this was the discussion of categorization of LGBTQ content in the context of a system that was designed by a virulent homophobe.

You don't expect that there are going to be a lot of really progressive voices in the early 20th century, but this was a disorder to Dewey and the work that it took just for it to be in different sections from a medical disorder of either homosexuality or transgender issues, even the fiction content there had to be reclassified.

And so the Dewey decimal system, I think, is a great example of codifying the way things are to one specific perspective. And in this case, an American perspective, which is then how all of this information is organized.

[00:51:01] **Jutta Treviranus:** Yeah. Dewey was homophobic, he was racist, he was sexist, he was everything, and his particular classification finds his way into all these taxonomies and ontologies of metadata of coding still in the digital world, in the library world.

And he of course created these hierarchies. What is at the top and what is trivial, what is important and what isn't, and assigned a codified place for everything. That also shows the history or the lifespan, the evolution of these complex adaptive systems and our unconsciousness of where does some of this come from?

It is a great example of why we need diverse perspectives. And especially now. One of the things that's so distressing is when I talk about edge perspectives, people think that I'm talking about extremism or that I'm talking about, the individuals that are have extremist right-wing or left-wing views.

And that's not what I'm talking about. And I think the one myth that I keep trying to get rid of is the notion that inclusion of edge perspectives is going to cause a greater extremism. When in fact what we found again and again, is if you make room for a diversity of perspectives, then you actually achieve a much greater equilibrium because you don't have these two polarities, which push against each other and become more and more extreme.

You can look at this from the perspective of physics. If you have a pendulum that is pushed in two directions, it's going to keep swinging higher and higher in both directions. But if you add other forces, the other perspectives, then it will find an equilibrium.

I'm going to take you on a tangent because I'm quite distressed with some of the practices that we have at the moment in terms of inclusion and equity. And I don't think that a lot of what is happening right now is or it's not getting us where we want to go, necessarily.

And that includes the polarization that is happening within the equity versus non-equity or equity versus whatever's not for equity movement. There is this sacredness in certain rituals and performative examples of doing equity or doing inclusion, and that is quite distressing. I think that the minute that there is a stasis or there is something that cannot be questioned, the minute we abandon self-critique, then we are going to ossify and we are going to become static. And that will be the end. The minute we say something is certified as accessible or inclusive or ethical than and that we have had success in arriving at something, that's our end, that's our demise. So...

[00:54:20] **Matt May:** Or as soon as we create the checklist for doing inclusive design, or we take down one well-defined structure and replace it with an identical well-defined structure, where there is no variation or variability to the way that you do things.

[00:54:38] **Jutta Treviranus:** Right. Exactly, yeah.

[00:54:41] **Matt May:** So let's talk about how not to do that. What are the things that if you had to give a class on them cause of design in five minutes, what are the things that you would want to do?

This is a great I've known you for long enough. I know that you can do it, but I want to get into the, like how, what are the things that people are doing wrong that you see and how would you reframe the mistakes that you see people making over your career?

[00:55:12] **Jutta Treviranus:** Okay. So you've just triggered one of my allergies, and one of the things I think we're doing wrong. But not as a critique. I think one of the things that's distressing

is the shallowness, the need for speed. The, you have to do something within 140 characters. You need to tell us everything, of great depth, within a certain period of time.

You have 10 minutes to do your TED talk, et cetera, whatever. So the distressing thing about that is, that means that we cannot take people far from where they currently are. It's going to take somebody a while to understand and to see the steps that they have to move from their current position.

But that isn't to say that you can't say something fairly profound within a short period of time. That you can give people the foundations of what is needed, but for them to really understand them and for it not to be just simply these words, it takes more time, and there's a succession.

You have to take quite a few steps away from where you are. So if I had to compress or get at some of the fundamental things without actually talking a little bit more about what that actually means, not your assumed understanding of a particular word, because of course, words are also such a slippery, strange thing, what a word means to you is not what a word means to me, is not what a word means to somebody else. What is fundamental to inclusive design? I think one of the first things, okay. When an image I can use to illustrate inclusive design, I'll use two things.

I'll talk about that human starburst. And I'll talk about what we call the virtuous tornado. So the reason for the human starburst is not because of process. Basically how I came up with this notion of a human starburst is because of 40 years of gathering data on the diversity of needs that people have. And the only way to actually represent that, because of course we all want data, we're obsessed with data at the moment, and data analytics and data is the only form of evidence that seems to be accepted. And we equate evidence with truth, and that's the only truth that's there.

Trying to come up with something that is much more true to diversity. I plot it in a three-dimensional multi-variate scatterplot, which looks like a human starburst. And that the truth that I gained from that is that there is this huge space, and most of us occupy only 20% of it in the middle. And the people that actually have some understanding and knowledge and experience of the rest of the space are the people that we're currently excluding in our design, excluding in our assertions of knowledge and truth.

And if we want to innovate, if we want to be creative, if we want to find the weak signals and the things that we've missed out on. And that we've forgotten about or have excluded, then it's the individuals that are out at that (edge) and the experience and the needs that are out there. How do we do that?

The way that we do that is through what I call the virtuous tornado, which is recognizing that we're never going to get it perfectly. And in fact, it's the imperfect, the impermanent and incomplete that are the things that we should value that have the potential. And it's that idea of potential that we need to keep seeking.

So the virtuous tornado starts with what we know at the moment as being the individuals, the experiences and the individuals that are currently excluded and have the greatest difficulty, and attempting to work with those individuals to create a design that is inclusive of them. And that includes the creating the process that they feel is inclusive of them.

And then going through the full cycle and iterating at the end of this cycle, where there has been an opportunity to try out the design, to evaluate, to determine is this addressing these challenges, asking again who then now is missing and what are the challenges that are, that the system that we've created as not addressed and going further out and further out at each iteration.

So it's a process without end, and it's creating a system or a structure that expands, and that includes more and more. Inclusive design is not about stasis. It's not about completion. It's not about reaching a success. It isn't about winning. In essence, it is actually quite counter to the fundamental way in which we make decisions that we plan, that we solve problems, that we think about education, that we think about work, that we think about value and valuation. It contests all of that.

And so it's a massive culture change. And at any point where we think we have landed on a dogma, or something that's sacred, or something that you know is a performance of inclusive design, then that's the wrong term. That isn't inclusive design.

[01:01:08] **Matt May:** So I want to ask a tactical question here, because this is something that I'm asked a lot.

Let's say you have a researcher that says, okay, this is what I want to do. I really care about this space. What do I do next? How do I reach out? Who do I reach out to? What changes do I need to make to the way that I do research, or anything like that with a designer or an engineer, anybody that's involved in the process because they start out and they built a head of steam. And then you get to the practical pieces of this, and then it gets substantially harder, and that's where people start to hedge their bets. What's the next step for people, once they have decided that they want to undertake this work?

[01:02:03] **Jutta Treviranus:** So it completely depends on where they're starting, and I think they need to start where they are. Say it's a researcher, a data researcher. Say they're into quantitative statistics. The advice I would give there is, let's look at that and query that and question why you're doing this this way. And who is it that you're excluding with that? And who is it that can't use whatever you're doing, or that your assertions are not actually addressing?

Do you proclaim this finding or conclusion based upon this statistical significance? Or do you look at, well, look at the spread here and look at the variability. You remove the outliers, et cetera. Almost any discipline, any field, any place where somebody is at, there is a reason for, or a process that they can use to say, wait, what is it that I'm doing that's excluding? What is it that I'm doing that is causing someone to be harmed by what I'm doing and excluded from what I'm doing?

There are so many issues with this idea of engineering. The denial, actually, within engineering is that the world is changing, that it's predictable. Engineers assume a predictability that yes, the world is complicated and we can work out the complication. That the risk mitigation or planning process, that there's some way in which we can predict things. When in fact, it isn't linear process. It's the black swans that get us.

In terms of engineering, there's the hubris that you can plan for anything that is going to come. And that of course, causes you to create these boundaries and linear processes, which are going to exclude. So that's the conversation with the engineer. For the clinician, or the medical professional, it's, how can you in fact have expertise in these things? How can you tell people what's good for them when you don't know the full extent of their life? When you're seeing

somebody and diagnosing them when you have medicalized these things and fit them into prognostic categories.

So for every person that intends to get into inclusive design, and I think inclusive design needs that range of disciplines, that range of perspectives, there's a different set of questions to ask.

[01:04:38] **Matt May:** Great. So I have one question that is all ranging. You can go in any direction that you choose with it, but who do you think is worth following in this space? Who do you think is doing good work? Who do you think is meeting the bar that you had set for practicing inclusive design, or has a critical view of inclusive design that you think is important? Anything that people can grab onto to further their own understanding?

[01:05:08] **Jutta Treviranus:** That's a hard question because I think there's a growing group of people. And so my sense is too, that is always changing. I don't like identifying just one person. But there are these nuggets that arise and people that come up with new things because I think inclusive design is a field that needs to, be continuously refreshed.

I think back though on people that I think we haven't listened to, people like Donella Meadows and the primer in systems thinking, or Ursula Franklin, who was talking about the real world of technology and rethinking technology as a mindset, this notion of acting like earthworms, the importance of earthworms. The preparing the ground.

I think what we need to do is to continuously search for people who are adding fresh perspectives, who are expanding the field, just like that virtuous tornado, who can give us some more information that is true to our human difference, true to the idea that we all have value, true to an understanding of complexity.

Sorry that-- I can name off a whole slew of people that are currently there, but I think the point that I want to make is that everybody has the potential to add to this field. And what it's about is adding those diverse views, those diverse perspectives to the whole.

[01:06:40] **Matt May:** I'm going to, rather than the narrow you down to people, I think fields of study, because it's the confluence of a bunch of different fields: there's research, there's design,

there's things like feminist STS, there are all of these other influences that come in and where academically would one branch out on inclusive design?

[01:07:03] **Jutta Treviranus:** I like to ask the same question. Who are we missing? What are we missing? So what are the fields or the areas of study that we have not paid adequate attention to? So the other ways of knowing, I think the pushing out of indigeneity and Indigenous ways of knowing is really promising the ideas of other groups or other non-Western views of history of culture, of what has value, the perspectives that we've denigrated are, I think there's a lot to learn there.

There's a field, which I think is really interesting and it's this notion of wisdom. We've been caught up in smart and intelligence and those sorts of things. But can we balance that with the ideas of wisdom, and what is wisdom? What we need to reach is an equilibrium, a balance, and that comes about by diverse perspectives and we can't go too far in any one direction.

There isn't an answer per se. And the reason or the way that we understand that and realize that is in bringing in that diversity of fields, of perspectives, of ideas, of experiences.

[01:08:27] **Matt May:** All right. I think that is a great place to stop. I want to thank you for doing this again, and we'll have show notes and we can put links to some of the things that you were talking about, like the virtuous tornado. And, yeah, I'm really grateful that we had this chance to talk.

[01:08:43] **Jutta Treviranus:** Thank you! It's been a pleasure.

[01:08:49] **Matt May:** That's our show. Show notes and transcripts for all InEx episodes are available at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. All episodes are released under Creative Commons Attribution, 4.0 International license. Thanks for listening.

Appendix B – Episode 2: Interview with Chancey Fleet

[00:00:00] **Matt May:** This is InEx, a show about inclusive design. I'm your host, Matt May. In this episode:

[00:00:08] **Chancey Fleet:** Graphics were something that I received. They were not something that I requested or chose. They were curated for me by textbook publishers and other sighted folks. There was never a direct path from my curiosity to an image being under my fingers.

[00:00:31] **Matt May:** A conversation with Chancey Fleet.

And now I am honored to introduce you all to Chancey Fleet. Thank for coming in and being on the show.

[00:00:44] **Chancey Fleet:** I am so happy to be here, Matt. Thank you.

[00:00:46] **Matt May:** This is going to be fun. I'm going to start with your bio here.

Chancey Fleet is a Brooklyn-based tech educator and activist who identifies as capital B Blind. Chancey is the assistant technology coordinator at the New York Public Library. In that role, she curates accessible technology in the branch collaborates across the New York Public Library system to improve equity of access and coordinates a diverse team of staff and volunteers who provide one-to-one tech coaching and group workshops, free of charge and open to all through a 2017 New York Public Library innovation grant, she founded and maintains a dimensions project, a free OpenLab for the exploration and creation of accessible images, models, and data representations through tactile graphics, 3D models, and non visual approaches to coding CAD and visual arts.

And I want to add on the land acknowledgment. OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat. Chancey and I are presently on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Duwamish and Coast Salish Peoples and the Lenape, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we stand and create.

So thank you again. I want to get started because I have so much to talk with you about, and I want to start first with just your background, how your career started, how your education came up. What's your origin story?

[00:02:05] **Chancey Fleet:** Oh, so I'm in my late thirties now and I was born in a tiny town in Virginia called Aylett to sighted parents who were not expecting a Blind child, but who turned out to be extremely prepared to have one.

Both of them are really free spirits, very creative, very driven and enjoy problem solving. So that worked out well. They pushed me from the very beginning to make my own way in the world to find my own ways of doing things and to set myself up for big dreams, for big self expectations.

They were also really good at telling the world to value me and include me. So just I'll share a couple of things. When I was six years old, my father got me a Toshiba laptop. The kind with two, three and a half inch floppy disks. And I had Arctic Business Vision on my laptop as a child. I could write assignments and print them out right there in the classroom. And I could read notes from my parents, like the ones that parents usually put in kids' lunches and I could play Zork and use a calculator and stuff like that from grade one. And I realized, although probably not consciously, it was just always true for me, that technology would help me do stuff without a bunch of people in the middle, holding my hands and slowing me down.

My mom was really instrumental in making sure that I got a quality education, including braille can travel instruction, that kind of thing. And she taught me a lot about self-advocacy. She went to bat for me so many times, and she made sure that even as a young child, I was in my own IEP meetings and that my voice was heard.

And both of my parents really supported me to be an advocate and an outspoken person. And they allowed me to talk back to adults who were being ableist. My father tells this story about a time when I was like *three* in the grocery store, in the little cart in the grocery store, sitting in the cart. And some lady comes by and says to me, because my eyes are doing their own little dance, as they will do, little girl, you better be careful. If you keep rolling your eyes like that, they'll get stuck. And I said, it wouldn't matter. I'm Blind anyway. And she just ran down the aisle. So that was the vibe in my childhood.

Technology continued to play a pivotal role in my education through middle school, through high school. I went away to a school for the Blind for two years and learned a sense of community for the first time there. When I was in middle school, I have a really strong memory of my computer teacher, Ms. Rinker introducing me to an OCR machine, the Reading Edge. And one day we were snowed in for the weekend on the campus and couldn't go home. And this little lady picked up the five, $10,000 Reading Edge in her two arms and walked it out of the computer lab and across the street and into my dorm room for the weekend so that I could just sit there and read a print book. And I will never forget that.

When I was like 10 years old, my father brought me to the VCU library and I'm not sure why they let a 10 year old child have the key to the disability accessibility lab, but he would drop me off.

And I would go to the desk as though I were a college student and ask for the key, they would give me the key and just let me go. And I would sit there and hang out and use the OCR tools there. I always had this excitement and joy and sense of possibility around tech. And when I got to college, I didn't have a lot of Blind role models yet.

I had read a couple of biographies by Blind folks that went into psychology. So I majored in psychology cause I didn't know what I wanted to do. But halfway through college, I started working part-time for our state agency training other Blind and visually impaired folks on how to use their tech. And I was like, wow, I like this. It's like being a therapist, but instead of problems I'm not sure if I've solved, I can deal with problems that have really concrete solutions. And it also involves working with people and helping people feel confident and empowered, but in a precise way, a measurable way. And that appealed to me. And so this became my career.

When I was a freshman in college, I got hooked up with the National Federation of the Blind, which is a civil rights organization. And they drew me in as they do with a state scholarship. And I started finally meeting Blind people that I wanted to be around and wanted to emulate. And that sealed the deal for me. I had some negative thoughts in my head about the Blind community when I was a kid. And those thoughts just flew out the window that they opened for me when they started to introduce me to Blind mentors in different fields and to do things like tell me to go meet my host family in Washington, DC.

And tell me to take three trains and not even ask whether that was going to be a problem for me. And I just loved it. I loved the trust that they put in me. I loved the high bar that they set for everyone in the organization and that involvement. And specifically my involvement in doing early testing and promotion for the first KNFB Reader got me recruited to my first sort of grown-up job after college. There was a recruiter in the audience one day when I was presenting the canopy reader. And next thing I was flying around the country, teaching federal employees with disabilities, how to use their tech. And now here I am.

[00:08:09] **Matt May:** I want to talk about where you are now, because I've actually gotten to visit you in your library.

The Heiskell Library in New York City. We got to do a tour of the braille library and this just fascinates me. And I think it's important for sighted people to understand what real libraries are and what they mean. So could you talk a little bit about just the print archives and what that means for the, consumers of braille content, how it gets distributed, et cetera.

[00:08:40] **Chancey Fleet:** Oh yeah, absolutely.

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled is part of the Library of Congress. And it's been around for almost a hundred years, I believe, and has traditionally sent out braille materials and audio books through the mail. These days, there's an app, the Bard, braille, and audio reading and download app where you can download Bard books on a computer and you can tune in to talking books or to digital braille books.

And we still of course have physical audio books available and hard copy braille. What's cool about the New York Public Library, Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library branch, where I work is that in our state, the NLS cooperating library is us. So sometimes in a lot of states, regional libraries are just NLS libraries and they're totally separate from the public library.

In our case, we're both, we are the NYPL and we're the NLS regional library, which means that our building has a diversity of people coming into it every day. So community patrons who might not have disabilities are there to go to story time and use the wifi and use computer labs, pick up their holds.

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And then there are a bunch of Blind people and visually impaired people and people with disabilities coming in to do everything from picking up books, to learning about technology, attending film series, going to crossword club, going to knitting club. And so it's a really dynamic space. And one of the things I love about it is that it's an integrated space where communities of disability and the general sort of able culture collide and interact. And I find that to be really special. Another thing that's special about our branch is that in a lot of states, the braille books specifically, because they're so large and they're typically mailed out in a lot of states, the braille books and the audio books are in a warehouse and you call up to get them, or you fill out a form to get them, and they come to you by mail.

But our stacks are open for braille books in New York. And so when you walk up to the second floor, There are stacks just like there would be for a print library and you can just browse to your heart's content and pull books down and see if you want to check them out. And you can skim through things.

And I first visited this library when I was visiting from Virginia, again, around the age of 10 or 11. Just the fact that you could go in and choose a book and read a book and decide if it was worth taking home. That stuck with me for years. And I was so happy when I moved to New York to reconnect with the library first as a patron, and then as a volunteer and now as part of the staff.

[00:11:22] **Matt May:** There are a couple of things I want to take off from this, but I want to stay on the braille for one second, because that transition from the printed braille world into the electronic braille world, with refreshable braille displays and content that starts to become accessible.

That itself is very powerful, but also. We're not nearly where we could have been. Because the idea of the book turning into something electronic also came with all of these other things that came along like DRM or just scanning the pages of books early on to make them look like pictures of a page.

And so you didn't get any of the benefit of that work that had to be done in order to braille, a trade publication or a novel or whatever that was distinct to bespoke work and these books for a

braille book. Can you talk about if it's a 500 page printed book, what a braille version of that is like physically.

[00:12:28] **Chancey Fleet:** It's going to be a lot larger. A bound braille book is going to be a lot larger. I had a pocket dictionary in middle school, the quote unquote pocket dictionary, which was a small paper back in print. And it was eight major notebook sized, 11.5"x11" volumes that took up half a bookshelf. I believe the Harry Potter books, an average Harry Potter book might be, ah, I don't actually want to speculate on what the exact number is, but it's larger.

If braille were print, it would be size 29. So that's going to take up a lot of space

[00:13:03] **Matt May:** Like a 29-point font.

[00:13:04] **Chancey Fleet:** Yeah. A 29-point font. Exactly.

[00:13:08] **Matt May:** So, enormous. And just the idea of shifting these things around the country, and the cost that's involved, and like you were saying the difficulty for you to browse that kind of material, you just had a catalog and you got it and you picked something out and you might wait years for the most popular things to come through.

That kind of could go away with the advent of eBooks, but instead we still have these kinds of barriers. And then there are things like the Chafee Amendment, which is essentially a law that enables people to break DRM specifically for the purposes of making it available to print disabled people, which is just the fact that you had to have that just in order for books to even be remotely available, not just in the library setting, but in education still underscores how big the gap is between print and braille content.

[00:14:11] **Chancey Fleet:** For me as an individual who has a considerable amount of privilege in that I've always had access to digital braille devices since I came to college, that gap has not existed for me in large measure since the very early two thousands.

And that's thanks to Jim Fruchterman and Bookshare, part of the Benetech organization. In the very early two thousands, Jim realized that Blind folks all over the country and all over the world

and their allies were using flatbed scanners to turn page by page, through books and make their own access.

I remember doing this from early college onward. And I would just get my music together or start reading a book while I was scanning it. And I might spend two or three hours to scan in a single textbook or a book for leisure sometimes more. But even then being able to do that. And get a scan that was readable was another really intense memory and magic moment for me.

I remember the first time that I OCRed something and then sent it over to a braille display using automatic translation errors. What is this amount of power? I couldn't even believe my luck, but Jim realized that we could avoid that duplication of effort by banding together, and we could deepen and broaden the availability of accessible texts for people that use digital braille, for people that use text-to-speech audio, magnification, all kinds of ways to read a book. And this was particularly welcome for me because I love to read. I've always been a voracious reader, and also somebody with esoteric interests. I have had interests over the years in speculative fiction authors that didn't ever quite make it to the NLS collection. I remember as a queer kid growing up in the nineties, not being able to find much representation of people like me in the NLS collections, all of that has changed a lot in the intervening years, but it was this anarchic wonderful thing when Jim started bringing us all together so that we could upload those individual scans that each of us had done on our own for ourselves and just amplify the impact that those had.

And at first, a lot of major publishers were upset. They were resistant, they were doing their best to create friction, but Jim constructed an infrastructure where piracy was taken seriously and folks using the system in abusive ways were really removed and faced actual consequences. And Jim's team and our community gradually earned the trust of major publishers to the point that now, most new titles that are added to Bookshare, I believe, are submitted directly by the publisher, which means there aren't OCR errors, there aren't weird little omissions, and now we're all kind of playing on the same team and just scoring win after win for digital accessibility for folks that are Blind, visually impaired, have cognitive and learning disabilities, have fine motor impairments that make it hard to hold a book.

I love NLS, and I love what the NLS has done for digital braille and the Blind community. But just as important is this radical idea that Jim had, that we could take our individual efforts and channel them into something that would invent eventually absolutely transformed the landscape for digital accessibility of books.

[00:18:18] **Matt May:** Yeah. And I think that one thing here that's important is the idea of mutual aid and of the agency of the Blind people themselves in this work, that there wasn't. So Jim, who, as I understand it is sighted. It wasn't that he came into a community and just said, here, I'm going to fix it for you.

That there is a community that is self-advocating and that is working on the solution itself, and coordinates with other communities to make that happen. It has to be clear that it's a partnership and not just a bestowal of rights from sighted to Blind people.

[00:18:56] **Chancey Fleet:** Exactly. He took what we were already doing and channeled it. And there was nothing, there was no saviorism, there was no paternalism. It was just, how can we take the power you already have and make it do more.

[00:19:13] **Matt May:** Yeah, the same thing with we mentioned the late Jim Thatcher and the screen reader project that he had worked on that was so that he could share mathematical equations with his Blind boss. These are the parts of the story that tend to be elided from the history here. That is always in partnership with that. It's always in collaboration with, it's always for the benefit of the user that we're talking about.

And not like it springs forth from nowhere.

[00:19:40] **Chancey Fleet:** Exactly.

I wrote Benetech a tongue in cheek. It was actually a compliment, but a quote unquote complaint letter because as a Blind child and teen and young adult, I had always managed to read the entire catalog of braille titles.

And so I knew exactly what my choices were. Cause we always had this feeling of scarcity and one never wanted to miss something that might be good. And I said, I'd like to register a complaint. There are too many titles and I cannot any longer keep track of everything that's available to read and that that's making me feel so much anxiety.

[00:20:14] **Matt May:** That's funny, that reminds me of, I grew up in a small town in Massachusetts and there was one record store in my town and I knew everything that they had there. And then I remember going to San Francisco one time and I went to Amoeba Records, and it's like a football field. I had my own existential crisis of, I am never going to spend enough time in my life to consume all of this musical content.

It was that feeling of just unbounded potential.

[00:20:43] **Chancey Fleet:** Exactly. That's what it was. That's what it is.

[00:20:47] **Matt May:** So I want to turn this to design because I don't know how you identify yourself, but I definitely think of you as a designer. And I think a lot of people just instinctually think of design as being a visual science or visual art, that it's something that has to have a visual component to it. And I know a lot of UX designers think of it that way. But I want to talk about what design means when you're Blind or when you have low vision.

What is the impetus, what is the process? What are the things that you wish people knew about Blindness and the lived experience of Blind users when it comes to making products?

[00:21:28] **Chancey Fleet:** So, wow. So I think part of my lived experience stems from Blindness itself. So as a Blind person, I benefit from elegant spatial representations that are non-visual, whether that's the quick and easy and very legible audio graphs that are available in the health app on my iPhone, or whether that means a team app that shows the relationships between streets and their points of intersection and their names in the most minimal pleasing way possible.

I can speak to my sensibility as a reader and lately a creator of tactile designs and other non visual spatial representations. But the fire in me for catalyzing community work in tactile design in

particular comes from having realized fairly late on in my Blindness journey that I had been living in image poverty this whole time.

And that it was avoidable. As a young child, I got lots of braille and I probably got more tactile graphics than most people because I got a steady supply of braille books. So a few times a year, a picture book would show up and often I would get maps or diagrams in my textbooks. But when I say often, maybe there would be 10 graphics in my entire textbook.

I don't mean that I got the same amount of images as my contemporaries who were sighted, and graphics were something that I received. They were not something that I requested or chose. They were curated for me by textbook publishers and other sighted folks. There was never a direct path from my curiosity to an image being under my fingers.

And I came to believe that I was strong and my verbal abilities and pretty poor at spatial thinking the arts, mathematics, science, all of that stuff. And I assumed a lot of things about my aptitudes and those assumptions drove my career trajectory and my studies and I have no regrets. I love it where I am right now.

But I discovered as I met the Blind community during and after college, I started to discover that there were Blind people who were joyful, absolute spatial thinkers, who could communicate something by drawing, who could understand a map in seconds who understood the things best when they were presented spatially Blind people who, if they were sighted would call themselves visual learners.

And I realized, oh my God, that's me. If you can explain an intersection to me, five times verbally. I will nod and smile and I will do my best and I will get about 40% of what you told me. If you show me a diagram of the same thing, I'm good. I've got it. It's in my brain now. And I'm going to negotiate that intersection, I'm going to make my way through the streets.

On the map that I saw, I'm going to be able to wire up a circuit based on a diagram, way more so than I can from a narrative. And I had no idea until I started meeting people at Blindness conferences who were doing this on the daily and who could show me how. And so by the point that all this happened, I was already a tech educator.

When I started to really focus on tactile design, I was already at New York Public Library in particular, a. A Blind person that was very well connected. A CEO reached out to me in 2016 and said, hey, where can I get a five-borough map? Because I'm moving to New York. And I want to understand how the boroughs interrelate to one another.

And I had to say, gosh, I don't think I know how to get you an answer. And that's when I started reflecting really hardcore on why we didn't have the ability to make a straight path from an inquiry to a tactile. And I realized that as long as we don't have access to the means of production for tactile graphics, and as long as tactical graphics are something that were handed and not something that we create, we're not going to move forward.

The state of spatial thinking creativity, self-expression in our community and it's going to remain the territory of a very few Blind elite. And I decided that I wanted to spend a big chunk of my life fixing that. And so I started the Dimensions Project in 2017. Got that CEO, their five borough map, by the way.

And now anybody can come in and make tactile graphics and 3D models. And so I consider myself if I am a designer, and see, I still make a make disclaimers and I need to learn to stop doing that. So although I am, as a designer, I am an outsider designer. I'm not someone who has that background.

I'm someone who has a keen awareness of what it feels like to be missing that background and everything that I'm doing now and everything that I'm pursuing knowledge of and everything that I'm building in my community is a response to that. That lived experience of finding out that I had an entire part of my brain that was under utilized because I didn't have images in my life.

[00:27:36] **Matt May:** So I can say as somebody that is working on my master of design project, that there's room outside of the imposter syndrome for both of us. I'm trying so hard just to be okay with this, but here I am. I've worked in a design company for 15 years now. I'm going through this program. I still struggle to call myself a designer.

So I think that there's room for a lot more people who are coming up with creative solutions to things that people are dealing with every day to just say it, that this is design. And on top of that,

just the things that you're doing at the library. I think when we did the inclusive design workshop, you co-facilitated the session at the library and showed us some things like 3D.

And I think you've done soldering projects. Like you've taught soldering in there in the library. And I think CAD, were you doing OpenSCAD or something for generating the 3D models?

[00:28:34] **Chancey Fleet:** So we teach. If you're Blind or working on visually typical CAD programs that involve rendering a rotatable 2D image on screen are not yet possible for us because the first generation of refreshable tactile graphics displays is still in development.

And even when it comes to market, it's going to be initially fairly low res. And so we're left with two, two great choices that we can mix and match. We can collaborate with sighted folks and we can co-design, which is a fun thing to do. When I was in lockdown and my community partner, Claire was in lockdown somewhere else, on the last day, the library was opened in March, 2020. I brought home a bunch of graphics equipment like Apocalypse Now style, just let me carry everything I can. Even thinking it was going to be two weeks, cause I couldn't be separated from graphics for two weeks at that point. And I brought home the embosser and we'd get on the phone and talk about a graphic that we needed to design for our web development class.

Maybe a color wheel that's tactile that shows folks the relationships between complimentary colors and maybe a tactile that shows different font types and sizes and serifs and sans and something that illustrates the box model. So we would talk it out and then she would jump into Adobe Illustrator and send me a draft.

I would emboss the draft and then we'd get back on FaceTime. And I would just point to things under the camera and say, hey, this here is great. This is really strong. Here's a place where we need a little bit more contrast with our dot heights. This is filled in and that's making it feel blurry. So let's make it a cleaner shape with white space in the middle.

And it was just the most satisfying thing during a time that was pretty, pretty scary and lonely. It was such a joy to co-design with someone and bring my experience of tactile design together with her experience of graphic design and make something that hadn't been done before. So collaborating is an option that we have.

And then the other option we have is doing our own design work, either using analog tools, like tactile drawing tablets and 3D printing pens and other, almost anything that's an art supply that's a usable done visually can be used as a design tool. But if we want to make something that's really precise, we might use code specifically.

We might use OpenSCAD to create complex designs that are made of parametric shapes that we combine, that we rotate, that we translate, that we group and duplicate and scale. And all that can be done with a coding language that's in my view, pretty much just as friendly as HTML. And we have been able to teach it to several cohorts of Blind and sighted folks that don't have previous CAD experience and don't necessarily have previous code experience either.

And I'm good enough to make something basic. So if you asked me to create a chess piece or a a signature guide or a minimal box, I could do that. Some of my students have surpassed me by leaps and bounds, which is very gratifying. I have one volunteer whose first name is Steven. If you've worked with him on OpenSCAD you'll know him, and he can take a look at something complex, like an entire puzzle with movable parts and he can go into OpenSCAD and recreate the thing.

And he also does original design. So there are folks in our community now that are really pushing the limits of what OpenSCAD can do for a Blind designer.

[00:32:25] **Matt May:** So that's great. And also ties into one of the core practices of inclusive design. So I want to use this to segue into the next segment.

We're going to take a pause right here. I will be right back with Chancey Fleet.

InEx is a major research project by me, Matt May, as part of the master of design degree program at OCAD University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Episodes and transcripts of this podcast can be found at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. Follow InEx on Twitter at @inexpodcast.

And we're back with Chancey Fleet, and we're going to get into inclusive design. And the question that I have been asking has been about inclusive design as a term of art versus inclusive design, as whatever people think is inclusive, plus whatever people think is designed to go back to the

definition that the Inclusive Design Research Centre puts forth from OCAD University." Inclusive design is designed that is inclusive of the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age, and other forms of human difference."

So how do you see that reflected in the world versus I guess anything that you just hear is inclusive.

[00:33:41] **Chancey Fleet:** Oh, that's a big question. My first response is that the ways in which people interpret and implement what they think that means create just a symphony of total chaos with a lot of unnecessary and unintended consequence generating designs and a lot of missed opportunities and occasionally some real wins.

[00:34:05] **Matt May:** I think it comes down to the composition of that interaction, of what inclusion is actually happening here. And I think in the last segment you specifically mentioned co-design and that to me is the baseline. There is not just some level of participation, not just that you've done some user research and you've already validated everything, but you're just going to go past a group of users and say, is this good for you?

But that the people that you're learning from, that you're collaborating with, you're doing from the instantiation of the idea. So this is where we get the idea of participatory action research, where the outcome isn't already there. It isn't something that's been proposed, that people are discussing, but that it's almost like you have a green field, you can think of anything that could possibly be created.

And that is the beginning of the relationship. And the levels of power in that relationship are more, even. That it isn't just, we have a researcher who is telling you all what to do, and then what they do with that information is all theirs. Do you see that as being something that's being propagated, that's being coming more popularized or is that still in the margins?

[00:35:17] **Chancey Fleet:** I think so. I mentioned my friend Claire earlier. I met her when she was a grad student at NYU ITP and she was doing a participatory design project and needed to find somebody to build with and for, and asked me what kind of problem I had to solve for myself.

And I said, I'd like to solve my problem of having to plan frequently large exhibit halls that might have 30 or 40 tables. And I wanted a digital way to move them around spatially in a non visual manner. Because again, I don't do well with textual narratives. And we started playing with some potential prototype solutions to that problem.

And eventually I was able to solve that particular problem in a different way, but we discovered that we had a really similar ethos and had the same kinds of thoughts about how to do actual good things in our communities with designs. And so she and I have worked together over the years on several things.

One thing that I really appreciate about her and about a lot of my other collaborators that are in academia, is that when they, and now we are doing research, we try to create things that feel organic and that not only are participatory, but provide a real benefit to the community that is more than just the hypothetical benefit that research provides. And it's more than just a gift card.

For example, we were able to do some research around that soldering workshop at NYU ITP that you mentioned, by getting voluntary feedback from the participants and also self-reporting as instructors. But we didn't do structured interviews with folks that took a long time and we were able to get those research goals met while offering an actual three-day soldering intensive that Blind people and visually impaired people and sighted allies were excited to attend from all over the country.

Regardless of what we got in terms of our research, everybody learned to solder. And similarly when Claire and I have worked together on teaching web development, JavaScript and CSS concepts, to folks who are Blind or visually impaired, we did get some research outcomes, validating the worth of tactile graphics in that instructional context.

But our main mission was to make sure that Blind and visually impaired people had a chance to learn of development concepts. And so I really like this idea of taking it one step farther than participatory action research to creating situations where research can happen, but research is not necessarily the only thing or the main thing that's happening and that a community benefit is being created there.

And that's a different way to make sure that people have power. Are you giving something to people that's worth their time? Are you opening up a meaningful experience that didn't exist before? And I'm not going to claim that the model that I believe in right now is perfect because I think my thinking is always evolving and there's always more things to learn about ways to do things better and even more equitably.

But I really enjoy that model. And I also enjoy being at the New York Public Library where we don't do research and having braille study groups and the Dimensions lab and accessible tech education, where, because we're a public library, we don't actually need you to be Blind, to take advantage of those opportunities.

And so sometimes what will happen these days, is a grad student who may or may not have a ton of inclusive design awareness or may not know about the conversation being had about participatory research. They may drop by to do some fact finding, and I'll roll them right into a braille study group with everyone else, or I'll roll them into whatever everyone else is doing.

And rather than me telling them how to do their research or that their project is headed down a terrible road, I can just shut up and introduce them to the community and let them observe how things are actually happening in the world where we live. And nine times out of 10, once they start talking to other people in that library space, or just observing, they will start to course correct. And it doesn't have to be a big didactic thing coming from me, cause I have more power than an average sighted grad student. And a lot of ways, if I were to say, you're doing this all wrong, that could feel very intimidating and that could probably shut somebody down.

And what we don't want to do is make people feel bad or make people not want to engage in communities of disability. We want people to be mindful and observant and use common sense and build the kind of relationships that inform good design and excellent outcomes. And I think one of my favorite things about the library is that it's a place where you can just build an organic relationship with the community if you're willing to do so. I think that really improves the chances that your design will be meaningfully centered on the lived experiences and wisdom of people with disabilities.

[00:40:46] **Matt May:** You actually brought up two of the kind of hallmarks of real equity in the discussion. Number one, the workshops that you're doing, we are proposing an exchange by which we gain this information, and you learn how to solder. Right? Everybody is getting something and everyone has a stake in the arrangement, as opposed to, as you were saying, the gift card, whatever. It's just almost a passing off of of that responsibility.

[00:41:13] **Chancey Fleet:** Yeah, it's a gig. It's a gig.

[00:41:15] **Matt May:** And the second one is where you're talking about being listened to in the room. That responsibility is born across all of the stakeholders in the discussion. I think a lot of the time, the discussion of equity is mostly about money for services. And that makes sense in terms of the stock market, obviously it's got a big connection to the term of money, but not everyone wants to be a software engineer.

Not everybody wants to be a product designer. Sometimes the people want to pick up this tool because they want to get the thing done, that the tool affords them. And that's it. If they want to be an artist for art's sake, they don't need to make the product and be involved in all of the decisions.

Everybody has a different thing that they want to get out of it and being able to tease out what is a fair exchange for that is also a form of equity work.

[00:42:08] **Chancey Fleet:** Yeah. And I think that cuts both ways. If you're a sighted designer and you are self-propelled or for whatever reason, you don't have a budget and you can't engage in that gift card economy to get good answers.

Like maybe you can do something else. Can you, are you good photographer? Can you take some good photos in exchange? Can you advise on something else? Can you volunteer a couple hours of your time to do a thing that somebody else needs? I think when we think about equity, it's not only about ensuring equity for people with disabilities, although that's super important.

It's also ensuring that financial contribution is not the only way that folks who need our expertise and wisdom can get that need met. Because we can all offer different things to each other. And a

lot of the meaningful projects that I've been involved in that turned out to be rewarding and generative didn't involve any financial transactions.

Claire over the years has written us whole curriculums and volunteered a ton of her time. Another community partner, Lauren Race, who's at Twitter now, decided to make her entire master's thesis a complete flight of tactile graphics for physical computing. You can find it at tactileschematics.com.

I hope she learned a lot from us and we've become really generative colleagues in a lot of ways, but again, she didn't need to offer funding. She offered her really unique and deep expertise and a willingness to address immediate needs that we had in our community.

And I just, I want to see more of that.

[00:43:54] **Matt May:** Yeah. And I want to juxtapose this against what I think are the least equitable kinds of arrangements. My understanding in the Blind community is that the example of this is the magic cane. What if we took the white cane and we made it something that was technologically superior...

[00:44:10] **Chancey Fleet:** What if we added lasers?

[00:44:13] **Matt May:** What if we added lasers? What if we had the laser cane? And so many different examples of this come up over the years where you can see that they didn't think about what the cane does. And so not being a white cane user, I would like for you to explain what the cane does, that's important that if you were to, if you were to explain why this thing matters in the format that it's in, so that you could talk the next generation of laser cane people into doing something more productive with their lives.

[00:44:48] **Chancey Fleet:** Oh my gosh. Yep. This is great. So among our staff and volunteers in the tech department and the back office, we always joke around we should have a public awareness campaign.

That's just the, it's a stick campaign. Why are traditional canes more effective. And normally you shouldn't call a white cane a stick, but we're going to make an exception here because it's literally... don't complicate it. It's a stick. Okay? What if you break it or lose it? What if you drop it down an elevator shaft or onto the subway tracks? Both of which things I've done. What if you break it on something and have to put it back together with a splint of a pencil and duct tape? It doesn't matter. It's a stick. It costs $30. What if it rains on it? What if you are kayaking and all kinds of sand gets in it, it's not really a big deal. Cause it's a stick. It costs $30. You don't have to charge it. It won't track you... cause it's a stick. You just move it back and forth and it finds things. And when you damage it, you get another one.

[00:45:49] **Matt May:** And that's the part that I think is just the most fascinating to me about this, because it seems like a lot of these projects are a hammer in search of a nail, right? It's almost like the exchange that's being offered is for you to be dependent on financially and with your own security to this company's product.

And that seems to be the opposite of what it is that we should be doing. And it boggled the mind when I first got into accessibility to find out that something like JAWS, one of the major screen readers for know for Blind and print-dis abled people was $1,300. And with that, you got one release.

You got one update. Which was an annual update for it. And then that was it. And that was the baseline. That was what you needed in order to use a computer, unless you wanted to use maybe Orca on Linux. This is before kind of VoiceOver took over on the Mac and iOS, but that idea that it costs a lot to be Blind.

In order to, just to have the baseline, like access to technology. And just to tell a little story about the green room experience today, when Chancey logged in, I think we spent at least a half an hour trying to get everything up and running. And we ran into problems with the browsers.

We ran into problems with the laptop, with the wifi, with the streaming product that we're using to record this, Zencastr. And one of the things was just getting to the buttons, the access to simply read the labels of the buttons. That's important *to me* because I want to talk *to you*.

And so the arguments about this on the web accessibility side of providing equity in these arrangements is another one, which is that it's about the community and the connectivity, and about the equanimity of the people that are working on these things together.

Everything that's happening right now is about collaborative software tools. And so if you have a mixed abled-disabled population of employees, which, parenthetically, you do, the idea of accessibility being something that is an add-on, or a nice to have, or we'll do it in another release. It doesn't work. You can't do that. And larger companies are hiring product managers whose entire job it is to evaluate products that they might buy because their own employees might not be able to use them.

[00:48:23] **Chancey Fleet:** Yeah. I want to address the consequences of digital inaccessibility a little bit, because even if you're working in digital accessibility and you're meeting people like me who are Blind or disabled people in tech or tech adjacent, you're not meeting all your users and you're not seeing what I see as a tech educator. For me, you could see me getting upset in a laughing about it way when things weren't going according to plan today.

But I kinda knew that I would make it to the finish line and I have made it a practice to deal with roadblocks in a way that doesn't really get to me and it doesn't get to my self image as somebody who's going to be a good problem solver and be happy to use digital tools.

As a tech educator. I'm often working with someone who's newly Blind as in like maybe two weeks ago. And I'm often working with people that have had low vision or print reading disability, or have been Blind for a long time, but who don't have access to the most premium forms of assistive technology. So for example, they might not be able to afford an iPhone.

They might be working on a lifeline Android phone, which has pretty shaky support for TalkBack and other assistive technology features. If you have a user who is not temperamentally perfectly suited to troubleshooting as almost a hobby, a couple of things can happen. A user can very quickly develop a self-belief that they're not good at technology, and that technology is frustrating and that they should avoid it whenever possible. Which means that you have done something harmful in their life and you have also lost a customer. And then the other thing that can happen

is that users can be frustrated by a single experience with your tech and they will never come back.

I still have people telling me that some technologies that they tried, five plus years ago, notably Microsoft Edge. Oh, I'm never going to use that again. It was terrible. And Microsoft Edge has been totally rewritten. It's using Chromium now. It works great with screen readers now in my view, but a bunch of users will not be back.

Narrator is another one. And I'm sorry to focus on Microsoft, but I'm thinking about Microsoft. Narrator in it's first in instantiation around I believe Windows XP had a very quiet, hard to hear voice, and could only read a few things and really couldn't be used at all on the web and was pretty laborious to even use, to go through basic system settings.

And now Narrator has great braille support. It's easy to use. It works out of the box. It may not be the screen reader that I would choose just yet for my primary, but it's like pretty great. If I'm at a public computer or I need to fix somebody else's machine or show a sighted person, how their tech works.

And I, I need a screen reader while I'm doing that, but there are probably thousands, tens of thousands of fine people who tried Narrator in 2003. And aren't going to try it again. So the stakes are high and you want to get people. You want to get digital accessibility, right? As quickly as you can.

So that the first impression that you make, which may be the only impression you ever get to make is going to be a good one.

[00:51:59] **Matt May:** I have had my fill of this whole experiment. I think that's what you're talking about. Like that if I'm tired of this, if I've reached my frustration tolerance for this, then no more.

And so it's additive from product to product. If your experience is to be excluded, then it doesn't take 10,000 times to do it. It's the first time where it lines up with all of your previous experiences of exclusion to feel left out of that experience, which is why you have to get it right as soon as possible.

[00:52:34] **Chancey Fleet:** Exactly. And then if you are in an organization and you know that you have a legacy of impressions that you don't like the consequences of, and again, I'm going to focus on Microsoft because what I have to say right now is ultimately I think positive.

Microsoft has done a lot in recent years to turn impressions around. They created one of the first comprehensive disability answer desks. They integrated that with BeMyEyes. So if you're an emerging computer user and you need an app that gives you an easier way to connect with someone, you can dial in, you can do ASL. There are lots of pathways to tech support.

And then they've also really been dedicating resources, not only to developing built-in assistive technologies, but to doing like pretty heavy community outreach and building advisory mechanisms, so that their pivot is noticed and perhaps embraced by communities of disability.

So it's not the end of the world. If you're in a company that's been doing work for 30 years and, you've got some legacy reputation to manage. But it does mean having a really bold and well-resourced strategy for turning that around.

[00:53:48] **Matt May:** Great. This is a good place to pause. So we're going to take a short break, and we will have our last segment with Chancey Fleet.

On the next episode of InEx:

[00:54:01] **Timothy Bardlavens:** I think if you are an individual contributor and you don't believe in the work that you're doing is equitable, or you don't believe that the organization itself is equitable, or whatever the case may be, find a new job. Because you don't have the power to make the changes and you are going to create so much harm for yourself by trying to go against the grain.

[00:54:22] **Matt May:** A conversation with Timothy Bardlavens.

And we're back with Chancey Fleet. And we're going to talk about the equitable life. You, Chancey, have your goals for how you want to live your life. What do you think equity looks like

to you? What is the average day for Chancey Fleet? Things that aren't equitable to you now, what do they feel like to you in an equitable world?

[00:54:49] **Chancey Fleet:** I dream of a world where my community demands and receives ubiquitous access to non visual representations of spatial information, whether that means statistics, art pieces, images, maps, on par with what sighted people receive

I think that we've done a pretty good job as a community as a movement to make it clear that we all deserve equitable access to books and text and the web. But we are so behind on our access to images. And so many of us, we have had our aptitudes untested and untried in the arena of spatial communication and expression and understanding that we don't even have the demand necessary to generate the change that I want to see in the world.

I want to light a fire of curiosity and joy and surprise and mastery in the brain of every Blind and low vision person that I meet. And I want to end image poverty in our community during my lifetime. I want to take tactile design down off the pedestal and put it in every pair of hands. And I want to see that the technologies that we've had for doing spatial representation and a tactile, or sonified way, the technologies that we've had for decades need to stop feeling arcane, mysterious and above somebody's reach.

They need to be for everyone. And that needs to happen pretty much immediately. So in an equitable world, I would roll into a museum and find ubiquitous, 3D prints that represent the things that are behind glass, that we're not allowed to touch. When I enter a subway station, I would get a quick little map that illustrates where all the platforms and turns are.

When I hang out with my nephews, I would have access to books that we could use together as Blind and sighted and those images, not just the texts, but those images would be accessible. And as a consequence of all that Blind people who think they're bad travelers would find out that they're spatial learners and they're good travelers and Blind people to think that they're bad at math and science would find out that they just needed to experience these things in a different way.

And, there are people that don't prefer spatial communication, and I get that. It's not for everyone, but the opportunity is for everyone that's got to happen. And then I guess the other thing that I really think about in terms of how I want to protect and defend my own equity is that I don't just want to be included.

Inclusion is a low bar. I want to be respected. I want to be asked for my consent and preferences and I want to be relied on to be a trusted contributor. So that can mean something as simple as, today I was in a waiting room and reapproaching my chair that I'd been sitting in earlier.

And somebody reached out and touched my arm to guide me. And I was like, oh, we don't have consent. And, that changed the conversation to something that she was familiar with. We had a nice exchange about it and I was like, oh, no worries. I just, in an ideal world, an equitable world, somebody that's just been informed about a boundary in a friendly way, isn't going to get upset and I'm not going to be afraid of retaliation.

And we're going to do the emotional work that we do in that moment to make it all good and move on, which is exactly what happened today, but it's not always. Equity in the cultural context also means that people will ask me for as much as they want to give me. That they will come to me for help, that they will come to me for skills and perspective, and happily that happens a lot at the library more and more.

But I think we have to get past this idea that Blind and disabled people are going to be the recipients of design or of anything else that takes skill and talent because we have an amazing amount of talent and resilience and so much to offer. But at this point in my life, being in a job that I love in a context that makes sense to me and having the tools that I need, and finally feeling like I figured out what my worth is in this world, it becomes my next project and a pretty high priority for me to think about whether I'm providing the most equitable and welcoming experiences to other people. And so that means realizing that as a Blind woman, I know one lived experience of Blindness and I don't actually know what it's like to be newly Blind and navigate competing priorities.

And that means I need to listen in spaces sometimes more than I talk, even though my career has rewarded me for talking. It's time for me to step back now and let other folks tell me about their

accessibility needs, their preferences, their dreams, the support they need. And for me to resist the urge to tell anyone how to do Blindness and to just present options.

And I think as we grow in the organized Blind movement and in communities of disability, a certain generosity of spirit where we know that we don't actually have all the answers and that we are not a one-way wisdom dispenser either. That's that's going to be the next step.

[01:00:30] **Matt May:** So many quotes from this. My ability to talk has helped my career greatly. Yeah. And the idea of listening, I continued to be humbled just by hosting this show. But the, what you were talking about there, what the Blind community has to give kind of reminds me of this other thing that I learned fairly early in my career.

The guy that taught me this was William Loughborough, and he he talked about blindlessness. What you lose by not being Blind. Which flips the script I think for a lot of other people. In the Deaf community, they talk about Deaf Gain. These are the things that Deaf people are good at by virtue of being Deaf.

And I wonder if you have any of those, if that resonates with you, are there things that you think that, that sighted people can learn? And I know that you talked, you just talked about this as my lived experience and there are others, but collectively, what is it about Blindness that you think sighted people need to know or could learn for themselves?

[01:01:32] **Chancey Fleet:** Speaking from my experience, I think having any disability that surfaces itself when you're interacting with spaces and people in technology has the potential to make you a really resilient problem-solver and good at anything that demands improvisation. And I've certainly found that to be true in my life and in a lot of the people that I admire and am in community with. And there are a lot of ways to get that gain, but Blindness is definitely one of them.

Being able to communicate complicated things through narrative. Noticing patterns in your environment. So for example, noticing terrain changes, sounds, openness or closeness of a space, and building a rich, spatial understanding of where something is without having a visual context. I think that's probably pretty powerful.

And then particularly as someone who centers my career and my life around community building, in the broader world, there's a lot of things that are really hard and scary and seem unsolvable right now. So we all have opinions about how the pandemic's being managed, and we all worry about politics, no matter what side we're on.

And it can feel like everything is so big and terrible. And ever since I've been in the organized Blind movement, ever since 2001, I've been able to take on issues directly and really notice that I was able to help solve a problem. So I remember going to Congress and advocating for the Help America Vote Act.

And then we got accessible voting machines. I came to the library as a volunteer and said, hey, let's start a tech education program. And then I got hired and then I made the Dimensions lab. And now we're we've got a lot of momentum and I did that with a couple of my friends. That happened.

Just the sense of agency in a scary world, that there are things that we can see and improve and maintain and care for really helps me feel good about my time and my life in a way that I think, and again, there's a lot of ways to get there. There are a lot of ways that, that non-disabled, people can find that joy in, in community and joy in the maintenance and care of the infrastructures that make life better.

But blindness was certainly a very efficient way to get there. And I'm not sure that I would feel the same way about my career and whatever my contributions end up being. And such gratitude for the support that I've received. If I weren't in this community, it basically feels late being, even though I'm in New York City, Blindness feels like a small town and I find that very comforting.

[01:04:39] **Matt May:** Great. So one last question. Who do you think is doing good work? Who should we be paying attention to? What things do you want to highlight?

[01:04:49] **Chancey Fleet:** Oh my gosh. So many people. For one thing, check me out on Twitter. Cause I'm always shouting out good stuff and sometimes dragging bad design. So both things can be found on my Twitter, I'm @chanceyfleet.

Oh gosh. I'm in awe of the work that's being done by the San Francisco Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired. I'm a bit biased because a couple of years ago I did join the board. So they do immersion training for newly Blind adults.

They've designed a beautiful building that embraces and highlights the strengths of Blind perception in some phenomenal ways. So for example, in the boardroom, there's a microphone system that amplifies everybody, but doesn't lose the directionality. So you know where somebody is sitting in relation to yourself, there's the design is done by the building was designed by Chris Downey, who's a Blind architect. And so there are tons of little touches and features everything from lighting to accommodate every conceivable type of vision to textures that are subtle and beautiful and rich and help you orient to where you are in the building. So there's a central sort of granite pathway.

That's the way that you circulate through different sections, and the acoustics have been handled with love and care. You can go up to the Enchanted Hills camp and and everything is accessible, but also just beautiful and natural and ambitious things are happening up there like stem camps and music camps and those immersions.

So I always look to the Lighthouse. When I think about what I hope for my own work, the Lighthouse hosts TMAP, which is a way to use open street map data, to create tactile maps on demand. That was invented by Dr. Josh Miele, who's definitely somebody to watch. And now the impact of that work is being amplified by Lighthouse.

We make TMAPs available with the library. If you want to check them out. During the pandemic, I was tremendously happy to introduce the work of Ed Summers, who works for SAS and has developed the SAS graphics accelerator tool. It's a Chrome extension that lets you bring in CSV data and turn it into rich explorable sonified data sets.

So when we were worried about COVID stats in a pretty intense way in March 2020, I was able to bring that free technology to our library, patrons and reach over a hundred people and show everybody, we know that a lot of the data visualizations about COVID right now aren't accessible, but here's what you can do. There is a way.

And I could just mention hundreds, more hundreds, more people I've already shouted out Lauren, Claire, two of my community partners that are doing amazing things. But I think just generally during the pandemic and because of our new willingness to try things out in a virtual context, I've found out that there are more Blind and sighted people quietly doing novel, groundbreaking, welcoming, joyful stuff than I could even imagine. It turns out that we've got a pretty deep bench for innovation in the community. And I would just say, use your social media. If you're comfortable doing that, pop in on free virtual events, do what you can to find out about what's going on in corners of the disability world that you're not directly connected to because there's so much out there and you can never shout out the best work because there is an abundance of awesome work being done.

[01:08:44] **Matt May:** Chancey Fleet, as always, it is a pleasure. I'm so glad that I had a chance to talk with you today. So thank you.

[01:08:54] **Chancey Fleet:** Alright. Thank you, Matt. This has been great.

[01:08:57] **Matt May:** That's our show. Show notes and transcripts for all InEx episodes are available at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. All episodes are released under Creative Commons Attribution, 4.0 International license. Thanks for listening.

Appendix C – Episode 3: Interview with Timothy Bardlavens

[00:00:00] **Matt May:** This is InEx, a show about inclusive design. I'm your host, Matt May. In this episode:

[00:00:08] **Timothy Bardlavens:** I think if you are an individual contributor and you don't believe in the work that you're doing is equitable, or you don't believe that the organization itself is equitable, or whatever the case may be, find a new job. Because you don't have the power to make the changes and you are going to create so much harm for yourself by trying to go against the grain.

[00:00:29] **Matt May:** A conversation with Timothy Bardlavens.

And welcome. We are now into our third episode. And with that, it is my great pleasure to introduce you all to Timothy Bardlavens. I have his bio here, and it's beautiful.

Timothy Bardlavens is chaotic good in its purest form. He is a Gay Black man from the Carolinas, the youngest son of a single mother and everything institutional trauma and oppression that says you cannot be or become. He has a product design leader, a cultural strategist, diversity equity and inclusion specialist, a co-founder, a writer and an international speaker and facilitator on topics of design and tech culture, equity, white supremacy, and systems of oppression. Timothy, thank you for joining us.

[00:01:15] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Thank you. I appreciate you for having me.

[00:01:19] **Matt May:** And we want to start with the land acknowledgment. OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat. Timothy and I are presently on the ancestral and traditional lands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish, peoples Kiikaapoi, Jumanos, Tawakoni and Wichita, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we stand and create.

We've gone back a while. I've known you for some period of time here. I want to talk about your career and how you came up and out of what motivates you in the design space. So we can we can take it from there.

[00:01:54] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah, absolutely.

[00:01:56] **Matt May:** How did you start? What was your motivation for becoming a designer? How did you break into design?

[00:02:03] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. I think it started with undergrad. So I was actually an English major and I wanted to become the editor-in-chief of Jet magazine, which is like the Blackest magazine that I knew of. And so at that point my minor was in philosophy. And so basically I was like, I should take some design classes. So I ended up taking a couple of design classes, change my minor from philosophy to design.

And then I was also at the same time working in the office of student activities and leadership or what you would call a student union these days. And basically are these two amazing people who were my supervisors, two Black women, Ms. D, Ms. Diane. And they're like, basically, you should just do this. Like you should just go in for it. And at that time I had created what we call tissue talk, which was basically this weekly periodical of events happening across campus. And then we would have student workers go and put them in all the bathrooms, i.e., why I called it, I named the tissue talk.

Funny thing about life. I graduated almost 10 years ago and they're still doing tissue talk. So I feel like that's my claim to undergrad fame. But yeah, that's what switched me into graphic design as a major. And then from there, it's kind of history in the sense that, it was kinda tough at first because I wasn't like an artist by trade or anything.

I didn't draw my life or anything like that. And most of these people had been in their major for at least a good two years before me. So I had feel like I played catch up a bit. But then after I graduated I went off to, I actually, first job was like at a trophy manufacturing company.

I got fired from that. Actually quit design for about three years and went into retail. I became a store manager in a couple of stores, and then it's really an, a, another woman this time a Latinx woman, or a Latina woman. She came into my store and she was at the time. And I think she still is the internal like vice president of internal communications, that bank.

This while I was living in Charlotte, North Carolina and she basically was like, your life doesn't start until your thirties. Like your twenties are a time where you're just trying to figure things out and you feel like you're not moving fast enough and all these things. And so basically she just gave me the encouragement to keep trying.

And he should actually even let me come to bank of America and tour and meet a bunch of people internally as well. It's like pushed me back to wanting to get back into design. I made a goal to find a job. I started off as a contract worker in a manufacturing company and their only marketing designer.

And then, yeah, I was in marketing until I think 2015, 2016. And then I learned about user experience and I learned about what that means and all the pieces of his research and all this in service design. At the time I was working at Capital One, they had just acquired Adaptive Path, which was like, I guess if IDEO was the big one, like Adaptive Path was the IDEO of UX in a sense is from my understanding.

And I went to their intensive in DC. It was a week long thing. And I left there like, oh, this is everything I've thought about. Just a totally different language. And so I just went down that path and I ran for it. And so I went to. A startup where it was like run by this guy who was actually a contestant on The Bachelor and, or on The Bachelorette.

And it was a terrible company, but I joined as the senior director of creative and UX, which was such a BS title. Cause it was me and one other person.

But that I was there for four months and then Microsoft called and I was like, y'all, don't want to hire me. This is not going to happen. And then I found a manager who was actually crazy enough to say, yeah, we want to offer you a role. And that's what moved me into Seattle for almost five years stint and going from Microsoft to Zillow to Meta.

And yeah it's been an interesting ride.

[00:05:45] **Matt May:** So maybe it was the "senior" that did it. Maybe if you had just been director, Microsoft wouldn't come calling, but now you, yeah, that level, that matters.

[00:05:54] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Exactly. It was that thing because it's so funny. Cause I, went from "senior director" to "designer 2."

And I was like, oh, okay. That's cool.

[00:06:03] **Matt May:** So getting into the business, how did that evolution kind of strike you in terms of the kind of work that you were doing? Like the the environment that you were in? What did that progression feel like from, you got a graphic design degree to this sort of moment of, UX is the thing you want to do, to settling in as a practitioner.

[00:06:22] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. I don't know, like it's, a lot of, it has been a series of like partially, luck, or blessing, depending on what you believe. Part of it has been like me just being willing to take like risk and big leaps of faith. Like I wasn't, when I was in Charlotte I actually had gotten a job at Ernst & Young and I was supposed to move to DC as a graphic designer for Ernst & Young, which is for most people who don't know is like a big accounting firm. Is one of the big three or something like that.

And it was a week before I was supposed to get in the car and drive up there. When something just told me, I was just, I'm tired of surviving. I want to thrive. Financially, especially, it was like a big thing for me. It was actually for a senior designer role. I think that when I was sitting there, I was like, you know what, moving to DC, making this kind of money, like I'm going to get a really small apartment. I'm not going to really enjoy it. And so in, at the time Capital One had just called in. I was like, you know what? I think this is the right thing. And that was like, I basically told Ernst & Young, sorry, I can't accept the role that y'all just gave me relocationand all this other stuff for, to go and take.

And I sat and I waited for six weeks for Capital One to call me back. And then I had to fly out to Dallas to interview. And there was no guarantee I'd get the job. And then once I got the job, then I

had to figure out, okay, how do I even afford to get to Dallas? I have no money. Cause I sat for weeks without a job. And so I had to go back and ask him like, hey, can you give me my bonus? So there's things like that, that I had to do.

Even me leaving Charlotte was interesting, because as like my first real design job, true design job, like one, only reason I converted from a contractor to a full-time employee so quickly was because I needed to get a car, but they wouldn't let me buy the I if I was a contractor and so I talked to my manager and they basically get hired to me that same day, and then just backdated the the hire letter so that I could get an, a car.

But then it turned out to be one of the most like oppressive places I'd ever worked. Like I was the only Black person in the corporate side. Everyone else worked in the warehouse. And so I had no one who really looked like me. And then also, like my manager was this white woman who I'd never engaged with people with passive aggression in that way. My mother is a very direct person. I'm a very direct person. So like, how do you counter passive aggression with directness when then you're always the aggressor? And I had to deal with that. And it was like all this other stuff and I just, it was so terrible. Like it got to the point where it, the final days where I just didn't know if that was the day I was going to get fired.

Like everyday I just went to work thinking today's the day I'm going to be fired. And it was a really, it was a really tough space to be in. Especially as someone who wanted to continue to get better and design who had like really lofty goals to be a creative director until doing all these things.

And, at that time I was just trying to figure out a new way to create a email template for this new machine that they created or wherever the case may be. But I think that it was good. I think it was a series of the right decisions. Like me not going to Ernst & Young, I think it was a really important decision.

And mean even learning about UX, but also being willing to say, okay, now I've learned about it. I'm going to trust myself enough to just throw some stuff together on my report. Like I literally, when I got back from the intensive, when I was working at Capital One I was an email designer basically there as well, but I was supporting copywriting, things like that.

And basically what I did was I created a bunch of wireframes and stuff. I was like, okay, cool. Like I'm just going to create the journey of what this email campaign would be. And then map that out. Or I did this like landing page thing. So I'm just going to articulate what are the different parts of the landing page?

It's very rudimentary stuff. I should not have gotten a job anywhere. I lucked out that the startup had no idea who like what design should look like, or they didn't have a high bar quite honestly. And I think that I'm really good at telling stories. And so I was able to get my way into that.

And then I had to learn Sketch on the spot. Up until this point, all I've been using is Illustrator, all I've been using is like Photoshop. Like I haven't been using anything else. So I had to learn on the spot and rush and go. I had to figure out how to create journeys for this new checkout flow and a bunch of other stuff.

And so I was like learning as I went along in that four months was super intense, but it gave me at least one portfolio piece, in addition to some of the stuff I worked on at Capital One to help me interview at Microsoft. And I lucked out that the person who I interviewed with quite honestly, I think that they had a very flashy view of design. But also how Microsoft did design was a bit more like they saw me as a pure UXer, not so much a visual designer, which helped me out a ton, but I was also, I was a solid visual designer as well. But I think that's what helped me was, I was a strong storyteller, which they really emphasized strong storytelling on that team.

And I had a pretty good rationale around product implementation and product design. That's kind of what helped me slide in the door a little bit. So I I think throughout my whole career, if it wasn't for the storytelling piece, if it wasn't for having that gift of being able to connect a bunch of stuff together and get people to believe what I'm saying, then I don't think I would've made it as far as I have. It's always been a thing that has helped me out a ton.

[00:11:32] **Matt May:** Yeah. And that narrative capability is just being able to explain your own designs, I think is so difficult. And, the portfolio emphasis, I think, just compared to the experiences I've had with interviewing where you just don't see the completion of the vision, that seems to be the part that really stands out.

So how was your experience as an employee because you're building all of these skills, right? You're developing things. You're learning things on the fly. You're also standing out because you're showing new ways of doing things in this startup and then, over at Microsoft, like how does that affect your work experience? Do you feel like in these places, like everybody's all the same? How do you feel that you, as a Black man in design spaces, how do you feel that your performing equitably? How do you feel like you have equity in that system and the places that you've worked?

[00:12:32] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. Honestly, I don't think I've ever really, I don't think it was ever fully equitable. And it's so funny cause I've actually, I actually I got a therapist, a few, like a couple of months ago and we've been working through this because I'm in this transition point in my life.

And one of the big things that I realized is that it was two things. One was that I had spent so much time putting so much energy into work and into sort of proving my value and proving like I'm good enough both to myself and to others. Because I think that's the thing about especially being a Black or brown in these spaces is that especially as heavily white and even like really heavily, especially in tech heavily white and of Asian descent folks, if you don't look like one of those two demographics largely then it's like this proving of belongingness that you have to do.

And so I'd done that for almost the past decade, but definitely for the past, five or six years. And in doing so, work became a major part of my identity. And an assault to me, institutionally from work was also an assault to my identity. Even to this point today, I'm realizing some of the trauma that I've experienced institutionally and some of the institutional betrayals that I've experienced, and realizing that a lot of the reason why they hurt even more was because I'd wrapped so much of my personal identity into work and my own personal value into work.

And so that's and so the results of that is also is that I've spent the majority of my career hustling, like constantly hustling. And it was to this point. And then I was talking to Steve Johnson, who's the head of design for Netflix. He told me, you're at a level now where you don't need to hustle anymore. You need to be strategic. And it's actually been a transition that I'm trying really hard to do. Because I'm so used to, I go into a company, I'm usually under leveled. I have to prove that I'm

valuable and worth being not well valuable and worth being at the company in general, and then have to prove my value and my ability to operate it to the next level or at the level I should be.

And I do that constantly over and over again, every company and I wrote in my first article of Navigating Whiteness that I've never joined a company at the level I feel like I should have been, I've always been under level. That's still true to this day and it's actually funny because when I wrote that with, especially working at Meta, they're like can you change this sentence, because it makes it seem like the same thing happened to you here. And I was like, no, because it did. I'm under level. And even with me being promoted, I'm still under level. And so one of the big things that I've been trying to work through my life too, is how do I stop hustling? How do I disconnect?

This exercise I was doing through my therapist just this morning. We were talking about words that define me. And she was like, do you know what words define you that are outside of your work? And I was like, I'm not really sure. So she pulled up this document and shared her screen and she was like, here's a bunch of adjectives. Pick out the ones that you feel like are related to you or you feel represent you.

I started with things like approachable and communicative and leader. And I was like, wait. And I had to pause with them and say, wait, I'm defaulting to looking at how I want people to look at me from a professional perspective. And so I had to go back and start over and pick four different words that I felt would represent me a bit more.

And so the ones I picked out were happiness, generosity, empathetic, and balance. And for me, I don't really know what happiness looks like. Happiness for me was always the thing I did at work. As opposed to what do I do when I'm off work? Cause when I'm off work, I just sit on the couch and I just like, I'm just like, non-existent. I think there's like this thought process that some people have a belief that you're the only real thing and everyone else is like robots.

And so when you don't see them, they just like power down until you see them again.

[00:16:17] **Matt May:** Like The Truman Show, you're the center of the universe and everybody's an actor that's like you.

[00:16:21] **Timothy Bardlavens:** And how I operate is, I was the person like who powered down. So you'd see me and I'd be all in. I'll be at this conference now, speaking of this thing and I'd be like at work and so on and so forth, but then I get home and I just powered down and I'm just in my own little bubble and no one sees me until I power back up again. And I think that's something that I had that I've been having to work through is, okay, how do I create that balance in my life? And how do I create happiness that's not attached to work. And these other things, because I spent so much time proving worth, proving value, proving that I should be in this space, like all this proving.

And it basically became a deep part of my identity that I now have to like dismantle and transition out of and become like, figure out who am I? Who is Timothy now? If let's say I get the title that I want, I get all these other things. Okay, great. But then who am I beyond that? And that's something that I've had to work through.

[00:17:17] **Matt May:** It's fascinating because that touches on the kinds of discussions that people are having about the idea of belonging at work or the extent to which your work is your life. And not just work life balance. Like I get off at five, but I still carry this stuff with me, but to feel like when I'm at work, that I'm doing things that are ethically aligned with what I want to be doing. That I don't have microaggressions toward me in the office, that I have spaces that are mine, that are safe.

And I want to get into the, like your current job at Meta and preface it by saying, when we talked about this before you started. And my reaction to that was, give or take: *what?*

This is, where you wanted to ply your trade, but as you become a manager and thinking about the role in the work that you're doing as leading a team of people and making sure that they feel that they have a sense of equity and that they have a sense of community and that you're demonstrating your value at a different level.

How does that change for you? Like how does that change the your perspective toward work, toward managing people, et cetera?

[00:18:36] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah, I think any manager will say the hardest thing to do, is balance your own personal growth with that of your team. Or your own personal happiness with that of your team.

There's always this thing of, if you're a good leader, then you really want to make sure your team is taken care of. And I tell every anyone who's on my team I believe that it is my ethical responsibility to ensure that they can have a job anywhere else. If they left next week, they would have everything on every tool necessary to get a job at any other company and be able to be successful in doing so.

And so I feel as though there's a lot of responsibility that we have that I have especially like even with hiring, like last year between myself and one other person we worked on this initiative and alone, like us alone, just two people, like two design managers, plus one recruiter. Our once talent sourcer, actually. We single-handedly tripled the number of Black women product design managers at Meta. Like when I joined the company, there were zero. Then Joy Roberts, who I worked with at Zillow. She was the one. Now there's I think, eight. And mind you, like that's still not a lot, but that's the way more than what it was two years ago. For me, a lot of the work that has been on the more, how do I build more equitable systems side, or how to like, think about my team is really, how am I actually being an example?

One of the things I did was I actually ended up switching teams, but one of the things I did on my previous team was I hired and built an all Black leadership team. Black managers. Majority were Black women. One of the most senior people on our team that was in that see she's one step from being a director, also a Black woman. And not only that, but she's a Black queer woman who is younger than me. And she is one step from director. And when I say younger than me she's 10 years younger than me. I think she's just hitting maybe 25 or 26, something like that, which is crazy.

But the thing is that I saw her talent and I like saw, like I actually, I intentionally reached out. Or I intentionally spent time understanding her in her work before we even hired her to make sure she'll succeed, she was going to be successful. I even sent her profile to all of our recruiting team that we worked with. I say, hey, if you were to look at this person's LinkedIn profile, what would

you bring them in and level them as, and hands down, all of them said two to three levels lower than her actual level.

And she has not only met expectations, but exceeded expectations at her level. For me, that's been a really important thing, to say hey, I'm going to prove it. I'm going to show you better than I can tell you. And then not only am I going to show you, better than I can tell you, but I'm going to make sure that every single person on this team feels as though they have what they need professionally, personally, whatever the case may be.

I think that while that's great, the downside of it is that also means that many times I'm sacrificing myself for my team, right? Like I'm being the umbrella for them, which means, okay, who's the umbrella for me? And I think that is always one of the challenges is when you have to sometimes make the choice between you and your team.

It seems like it's an easy choice, but it's really not. And I've had to work through the guilt of making the decision for myself as opposed to my team and being like, look, I'm here for y'all, I'm still going to support you, but I gotta do what's good for me. And so those are some of the things that I've had to work through that are just like hiring challenges, making sure people get like adequately promoted and level of making sure that even before you joined the company, are you at the level you re you deserve to be?

And like even getting challenged by other leaders and being, hey, you're advocating too much for this person. Or if I'm saying like, hey, I think you're under leveling this person, here's my story. And then the feedback is when you tell people that it shuts down the conversation, it makes them not want to argue.

I was like that's fine. They shouldn't. it's still the reality. And so those are some of the things that, that I have to work through just on the people side of things. And that doesn't include the normal hey, because this person is a woman how are they being treated by their male counterparts?

And are they actually supported and so on and so forth? And how do I make sure that I'm a champion for a whole bunch of different types of people and also be seen as impartial and fair,

but also like I, it was like this balance of having your team's back, but don't advocate too much because I can be seen as a negative thing.

And it's like a weird dance that you have to.

[00:23:14] **Matt May:** And this is why the conversation is, okay, so we're increasing the diversity of the organization, but they're all only at the lower levels, right? You have these new hires that are coming in, that are diversifying the organization, but being a people manager, you have an umbrella effect of the people that are below you. But then you have to do this kind of grassroots effort to create a coalition, not just an employee network, but one-to-one relationships with people just to make sure that you've raised the volume enough about the people that need to advance from there.

[00:23:46] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Absolutely, and the big thing is for me is, even setting people up for success on faster trajectories and promotions where I need to I've had to make sure I do that at least for my team. Again, I can show better than I can tell.

But the other piece to that point, and this is actually why I started focusing on specifically Black women, but Black women leaders was because I realized that it's about network, right? And if you're coming in as a leader, like especially people manager and you are of a historically underinvested group, nine times out of 10, you have a network of other people that look like you, that you can bring in.

And so if you have the power to hire or influence in any way, then most likely that's going to drive more people who like you coming into the organization. I really realized, especially when it comes to a lot of these efforts is like it has to be a top down kind of thing. And actually, no, it has to be a sandwich, has to be bottoms up and tops down.

But I think that. You have to get a bunch of the middle managers who are like Black women or Black, gay or whatever the case may be because that's where you get that, that closer connection to building up the teams. I think where it can fall apart though, is one, it's really tough to get people of color executives. We're just not promoted quickly enough as our counterparts. But also I think that the other part is just we also run into some of those folks who are of historically

underinvested or marginalized backgrounds who feel as though they can't, or shouldn't do the work. Or don't want to do the work when it comes to diversity, or whatever the case may be, because they're like I just, I don't want to do that. I just, I don't want to be known as the Black manager. I just want to be known as a manager. And I think the downside of that lack of intentionality is one, we always have to pay the tax as leaders if we do the work.

But if we don't want to, that also means that the impact of that is we end up upholding the status quo. Like we end up wholly upholding white supremacy or whatever the case may be because of it. So it was kinda like this, it can sometimes be a damned if you do damned if you don't scenario.

[00:25:58] **Matt May:** Yeah. On the one hand, the bring your whole self to work, but then there's a lot of baggage that goes along with that too. So that's actually a good place to pause here so we can start getting into what an equitable environment looks like. And then start talking about kind of UX not just from the career perspective, but from from the inclusivity of user experience across racial divides for example, across like the, all forms of human difference, as we say in inclusive design.

So we are going to take a break. We'll be right back with Timothy Bardlavens.

InEx is a major research project by me, Matt May, as part of the master of design degree program at OCAD University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Episodes and transcripts of this podcast can be found at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. Follow InEx on Twitter at @inexpodcast.

All right. We're back with Timothy Bardlavens. In the first segment of this, I think was there was a lot of career stuff. And I wanted to connect this back to inclusive design because one of the key principles in inclusive design is about there being equitable interactions and having people in the room. That we're making decisions collectively. And when you don't have an organization that's diverse and more importantly, the diversity doesn't get to express itself. The actual division between like diversity and inclusion used to be the, at first they were just juking the stats, right?

Trying to increase, basically women and ethnic diversity in the workplace, but not really giving them any power in changing the system as it was. Equity comes in here as not only do we have a workforce that sort of reflects the population of where we're at but that there's an equal amount

of power being shared among all of the people in the system or participating in the system, whether they be customers or people that are in user groups or what have you.

So talk to me about the role of equity from kind of an advocate's perspective on that.

[00:28:09] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. So there, I guess there's so many ways to look at it.

[00:28:12] **Matt May:** I guess let's start off by defining our terms here. Like how would you define equity in this context?

[00:28:19] **Timothy Bardlavens:** I think equity, equity in this space of let's say organizations.

So how I think about it is to look at a few ways, but let's say you look at the entire employee journey, right? You have sourcing, recruiting, hiring, onboarding. And then it is development and performance, things like that all the way around to off-boarding and leaving the company.

And mixed in there is of course conversations around pay, around growth trajectory, all those things. And I think that when you think equity, I think… It's not just fairness. Cause I think a lot of people, they say, hey, we just wanna make sure things are as fair as possible. But I think fairness in my mind lends itself to equality. It's like, hey, we both have the access to the same resources, but in having access to those same resources, one part, one set of people are going to have a better experience than the other most likely.

Ultimately equity within the space of let's say an employee's experience is, not only do they feel like they are getting paid equivalent to their counterparts, but also they have access to sponsorship, and clearly articulated intentional sponsorship.

Cause I think intentionality is a super key here. Is it set up in a way that is specifically made for this person or set of people or is it serendipitous and just so happen they have access to it. But there's also things of like, when you're on the team, what is your experience like? Are you actually heard, when you say here, this is a problem I'm having a problem. If you actually take action, do they actually look into it or are you saying hey, it'll be okay. Just give it time or wherever the case may be and they're gaslit.

So I think there's an experiential piece of it, of course. But then I think there's also the actual, tangible things, like pay, like equal voice at the table, quote unquote and equal voice when it comes to deference. Will people actually listen, but also not only listen, but actually take action and in taking action where they come back and give you credit for the things that work really well, so that you have that promotability, trajectory, et cetera.

It's a very long-winded definition, but it's just so all encompassing, it's hard to define it in one specific way or another, like it's more than belonging. You can belong at a place and still be underpaid and underleveled. And you wouldn't know unless someone tells you, so it. Yeah, it depends.

[00:30:37] **Matt May:** I think a part of it is, a lot of the discussion that happens around this is about just the working environment, the money situation. But to go back to your own story or earlier on about things like paying for relo, or even allowing work from home, that the working environment itself is something that has barriers to it, coming and hiring somebody new into San Francisco is just one of the most expensive places in the world, has implications. Not only if you have to move away from your family, if you have supports that you use at home that you're not going to have somewhere else. That's a part of it too. Sometimes just the structures of an organization dictate who is going to work on it.

[00:31:18] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. So I think about this a few different ways. I was working with this person who they worked in the Bay for years, because that was where work was. And so they'd been at the company for some time, but they worked with in the Bay and then they realized, this is a Black man. And he realized, I want to be around more of my people. I want to get married one day. I want to have kids. And I want to be in a place where I have access to that population of people, because the Bay doesn't have a lot of Black people in general.

And he made a decision to move from the Bay to Atlanta, but in doing so, he was forced to transition from being a manager, to being an IC. And he was basically held back from a levels perspective. Like he didn't get the same kind of growth and development over the subsequent, three, four or five years as his peers who were directors and even some VPs, because he wasn't in the center of power really. He wasn't in the Bay.

And it wasn't until pre post COVID where they actually had to correct his pay to make it more equitable based on new policy, where he was able to then transition back into being a manager, to get promoted up relatively quickly to level that he believed he deserved to be. But if it hadn't been for COVID, he probably would not have this same opportunity. When you have these companies that are based in a specific area, but then they say, hey, we want to increase diversity. But then in doing so you're ripping people out of areas of comfort, and you're wooing them with all this money, but then you realize that the money is actually, maybe it doesn't go that far, because in the Bay it doesn't go that far because you realized oh, like I'm making $130,000 a year, but my rent is $4500.

And so I only have enough to maybe buy groceries after that. Or I can never buy a house because I don't have enough money or whatever the case may be. It's really interesting to see how companies have become more equitable from the perspective of especially location, thanks to COVID. While also understanding that, what they perceived as equitable was the I'm going to pay for you to come to this or travel across the country or whatever, to get set up and work in this place. And in my mind, like something that was always weird to me was, especially when it comes to teleworking is you would have people let's say who, let's say there's an office in Menlo Park, but there's also offices in New York and Seattle and other places.

And so for whatever reason, A person could have a team that's across the entire country, but still be based in one location. But for some reason I was very different than you working from your home office and having a team spread across the country. And for some, whatever reason, people never really seem to understand that those are the exact same situations.

Only thing that was different was whether you go into an office or not. But it's interesting how a lot of folks sort of, their mindset shifted so quickly. But they were also very stuck in this very one dimensional way of work. I think what I appreciate with these changes are things like being able to work from where you want.

So me, I moved to Dallas and I work fully remote. And for me that's great because my money goes much further here. I can get a nice size house. I know I can build a family. I know I can pay for

things and not be worried about well, is it going to take a vacation, or saving money to buy a house or paying rent?

Like I don't have to make those choices as much.

[00:34:51] **Matt May:** So this is funny. I did the same thing. I moved to Texas after having been working at the same company for a few years, from Seattle and just the oh, wow, this is very different. What my lifestyle was like in this place that was cheaper, changed dramatically. And yeah, spot on, that feeling of, why can't I have this level of compensation for the place that I want to live?

[00:35:17] **Timothy Bardlavens:** And I think even now though, I still struggle with companies who do this whole hey, we're going to shift your pay based on where you live in the country to make it more market appropriate. And it's...

[00:35:28] **Matt May:** Yes.

[00:35:29] **Timothy Bardlavens:** I hate that because ultimately what you're telling me is that I can do the exact same work as another person, because I don't live in the same area, all of a sudden I'm less valuable. It doesn't really make sense to me. And it doesn't matter how you slice it. It just doesn't make sense.

Because let's be honest, I feel as though on some level, even people who work in the Bay, in Seattle, in New York, places that are higher cost of living, they still don't really make enough to really thrive. That being said, I do think that's the one thing that is still, left to be desired.

If knowing me moving from. San Francisco to North Carolina is going to change my pay by 20%. Do I really want to do that? Do I want to take that much of a hit? I think that's something that some people are struggling with is, I don't want to take the financial hit. I want to be able to take my same paycheck and go in somewhere else. When I bought my house, one of the conditions they had for me closing that home was showing that me moving from Seattle to Dallas, it wouldn't patently changed my pay in the way that would make owning my home more difficult.

And so it still is some issues from an equity perspective that I think are tough and that needs to be worked through. And I think at least people being able to work from whoever they want is a good start.

[00:36:40] **Matt May:** Yeah. There are lots more pieces to that we can discuss about the working environment, and the cohesion. How people end up working together. But what really struck a lot of people in the disability community about this was that these discussions were a non-starter before COVID. Anything that required anything out of the ordinary for you, even if it was something that was legally obligated for an employer to provide, was something that was just technically far too complex.

If somebody needed to be working from home regularly, it was like, oh, we'll find some other accommodations so that you can come in and work in the office for this. And then suddenly everybody's, oh yeah, you can work from home. Your kids can go to school from home. And then now we're actually seeing these things start to be peeled away in the return office discussion as well.

And so if you had this opportunity to provide a working environment that people were satisfied with, then what gives you reason other than economy to take it all away?

[00:37:39] **Timothy Bardlavens:** I think even with that, like one of the things that struck me as so interesting was when there was this transition to work from wherever you want, these leaders who maybe just a year or more ago were so adamant against it.

All of a sudden they're like these big proponents. It's almost like the work-life balance thing. Oh yeah, you can work wherever you want. Like I'm going to go. And I bought a house, I'm living in Hawaii. Like a fad or a fashionable thing to do, to work remotely and to pick some random place like, oh, I'm going to go to Utah and work from there, from now on or whatever.

And it boggles my mind because y'all were so adamant against this. Or aw, man, I miss people so much. I miss people so much. You miss people so much, but at Meta, at least, we always had the ability to fly to different office locations. That's never been taken away. So what exactly is the excuse now? With the return to work, really does the excuse boil down to, hey, we have these

leases and these buildings and we have to justify keeping them for some reason, because this sort of stuff feels like.

[00:38:39] **Matt May:** That's the only thing that's come to mind for me about this, that it was, there was a certain amount of a face to face interaction and a certain amount of surveillance that people were going to do their job. Because you look in the business magazines and you see all these articles about everybody's doing a side hustle while they're in the office. It just scares people into thinking that they're being cheated out of labor. And that the only way to avoid that is manual oversight, which has a lot of implications as well. It's still a thing that, that sticks in my craw.

I want to change gears and talk about the discussion of equity at a product level. We were talking about my model for how this works, which is when we talk about all forms of human difference, which we do in inclusive design all the time, that when we talk about disability inclusion, we're talking about we're talking about accessibility, like software accessibility and that when we talk about any other form of racism, gender, LGBTQ, language, literacy, culture, all of that is not considered to be a software issue. It's considered to be more an HR, hiring, promotion kind of issue.

But that leaves two huge gaps, right? There's the disability employment that remains a major problem. And there's also the sense of inclusion at a product level. One of the reasons that this is so important, the career path and making sure that everybody is spread out within the organization that is at all levels of the organization, is that it affects what you create in the end.

That the decision-making is filtered through all of these lived experiences. And, can you talk about that? Can you think of issues that you run into or that you can see, that a white designer that's only ever lived in San Francisco doesn't see in the way that they are developing UX, portraying users in imagery, what have you?

[00:40:32] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah, one thing that we've been pushing on for a while, there was like this stronger transition of focus on product development through the lens of social identities, right?

When I was in communities, we were looking at how to just help people join. But then when you start thinking through, what does safety look like and how do you think about safety from the lens of communities on Facebook, but also through the lens of, let's say the most marginalized, let's say a Black trans woman.

Hell, you can layer on a Black, trans, disabled woman, and then you have the most marginalized of the marginalized. And so you can say, okay, what does that experience look like? And you start to think through, there's examples where you know, a couple of years ago when we had the killing of Breonna Taylor and everyone else, like all those folks that were murdered and so on and so forth.

And we had the whole social uprising and things and what we found, we actually did the research it's happened to me as well. Like I actually had personal experience, but also we did, we saw it come up in research where we saw these Black folks who were in these plant lover groups. And in that plant lover group, they're like, we don't want to talk about social issues. That's not what we're here for. We here only talk about plants. And some people were like, we're still humans. And there were a group of people who have built some level of relationship. Shouldn't we have these conversations about what's happening in the world?

You have this big dichotomy and where people like even myself, like I felt unsafe all of a sudden because like wait. So we can talk about one thing, but when we talk about social issues that are deeply affecting us, then all of a sudden this group is in a safe space and isn't right for us. And this is something that especially Black folks do, but I think most people do who are of a marginalized identity, is like they bifurcate what part of themselves shows up in what spaces and to have to do that through digital experiences, it makes it even harder because the assumption is that through a digital experience, you actually can be more of yourself because it takes away some of that judgmental barrier as in human interaction.

And so it becomes really tough. I think another good example is, we were looking at some potential product experiences and these folks, they were getting really excited about doing focus on humor and in the space of communities and groups. And there was a suggestion around hey,

what if we gave people the ability to create memes through the composer on Facebook. And I was like, nope! Not going to do it. Not at all. Nope.

And people are like, no, this is so great. I was like, I can see the New York Times article now, that says that Facebook has allowed someone to create some misogynistic, xenophobic, racist, sexist, whatever post. And it's being shared across the whole world. I can see that headline it right now. No, we do not have the mechanisms in place to be able to effectively read what it is on an image and assess whether or not it's harmful. We can't do this. This is a no.

[00:43:25] **Matt May:** An attractive nuisance. Microsoft had, that AI, that they put out on the internet and it was trained to be racist through a chat interface. There was the Snapchat filters. All of these things that you see pop up and you're like, was there one person of color in the room where the decision was made to do that. Did you think fully about the consequences of this?

I think Facebook, the app as supposed to Meta the company, like Facebook has this as probably one of the biggest issues, just because it's a blank slate. There is content moderation all over the place, but then the discussion of what's in and what's out tends to be the important part, the user generated content is 99.9% of what Facebook is.

And then you have these sort of debates and discussions of who's allowed to say certain things in what spaces. And that to me is why there needs to be more voices that speak up and that like in those rooms so that there are more of those nopes. You're like, instantly, let me give you the list of why this is a bad idea.

[00:44:28] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. I think even that though is and this is where, like I said, this damned if you do, damned if you don't scenario comes in for folks under represented communities. People always ask this question was there at least one person of color in the room or so on and so forth.

And it's one, does there *have* to be? Do I always have to be in the room for you not to do something stupid? Or if I'm in the room, do I always have to be the one to speak up? Then what happens is I'm always willing to speak up and push against it, then I become the contrarian,

which means I'm now the troublemaker, which means it's now affecting my growth trajectory and my promotion ability and like my likeability.

[00:45:04] **Matt May:** Yeah. The culture fit, that kind of argument. Oh, you didn't fit with the culture and yeah. And this gets to another issue of this. So if I'm talking about something, cognitive, something that relates to my ADHD or neurodiversity, there are things that I bring to it that it's this is actually for me. I'm self-advocating. And there are lots of different people that are representing one or more marginalized communities in this space.

Ultimately, there needs to be some cross-pollination, that people need to start to understand more deeply that this is happening because for all of the other privileges that I express, I get to be in a lot of rooms and surprise people with the fact that I'm not going to go along with whatever racist, anti trans kind of decision that's being made.

How do how do you foster an environment where people stop only listening if there's one person in the room doing this, but instead start sticking up for one another.

[00:46:04] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah, I honestly, and it's something that somebody wrote about in part two of Navigating Whiteness, which was really around addressing sensibilities and your own sensibilities.

And it's a thing that. There is no way to create a system around it. It's, there's no way to create a framework for it. There's no checklist for it. It legit takes people being intentional introspective and doing the work. And I think that's what makes it so hard, is because you are asking people to have a level of humility to say, it's not about me, it's about this other person, this other thing, this other group, or let me go and learn and understand and do my best to do that.

And again, have enough humility to make myself uncomfortable, to be able to learn, and then in learning, be able to take that and move forward with it. And I think that's the thing we struggle with the most.

A good example at the most basic level is masks, right? Some people are like, I don't want to wear a mask. It's against my freedom. I don't care. And other folks like, no, you need to wear a mask

and it's not just for you, but it's for everyone around you, it's for your family. So on and so forth. But the vast majority of us are very, whether it or not, like we're all we're all selfish. And so unless you've been built, like you've grown up in a society that is innately community oriented.

Honestly, if you look at like places in the Middle East or Africa or Latin America, like these quite honestly nonwhite countries, that there's more of a community orient. And so it's less about I, and more about we.

But us as Americans, we're all about American exceptionalism and about us and our individual liberties and our individual rights. And we forget that there are other humans around that we have to think about and care about. It's a dilemma of innovation. To be innovative. You have to do a thing in the corner by yourself and don't let anyone see it and then rush it to market as quickly as possible. But in actuality, what you're doing is completely cutting out a whole subset of people.

We should actually have opinions and thoughts and perspectives on that thing because it then becomes not only effective and successful, but also it reduces the harm of it. And I don't think people really understand yet how to get out of their own way. And like you remember, like there was a whole wave of empathy in design empathy.

[00:48:31] **Matt May:** We actually already had this conversation before. I bring up empathy in these interviews because I have a particular perspective on it, but the word humility has come up just as often. And I think even if you have cognitive empathy. Not just that you're putting on the outfit of somebody that has been expressing their lived experience to you. Like that the movie is playing for you, right? Like the, we were talking about earlier, but that you, from your perspective can genuinely see and understand the perspective that's aside from you. That can be beneficial.

But, without the humility to understand how limited your perspective on that is, when you turn empathy into something that gives you pride or gives you status or something that makes you different or better than anybody else, then you've completely lost the plot. Right? You're now basically just acting out all of these different kinds of people whose experiences yet that you've never had.

[00:49:32] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. And it also becomes this thing of I've seen it two ways, but a lot of it really ends up landing on the area of saviorism. I learned about these people, I'm going to help them because I understand how to help them best. And it's worse. It becomes really paternalistic.

I think that is the biggest struggle when it comes to this. People ask all the time, hey, how do we create more equitable products? How do we do this? How do we do this, how do we do this? I can't help but always answer the same way, which is you need to do some internal work. Like you need to be introspective. You can literally have all the questions that you would ever ask about racial justice and equity and all these other things to make sure you're doing the right thing from a product perspective. You can answer all of them thoughtfully. You can have a whole 600 page dissertation and still create the most harmful products.

And you will look at it and someone will say, hey, you harmed me. Or you harmed this whole group of people. And they'll say, I don't understand how, we did all this work. Look at all what we did. It can't be possible. And then they'll be in complete denial. And it's because people just don't understand how to do the work.

It's not just doing the work internally, but I think there is always still that external component of, do you need to have the right people in the room because you should be able to gut check and be like, hey, these are my thoughts. What are your thoughts? Or, do you see this differently? And you can have a conversation about that as opposed to sometimes being the token in the room and you having to be the voice of, hey, Black person. Do you think this is okay? Is this racist? No, it's not. Okay, great. We're going to do it. Here's another thing you're forced to one person to be the monolith for the entire race.

So you have to have an internal work which is paired with having the right people in the room who have an actual voice that is valued, that has deference, and that will actually move the needle.

[00:51:19] **Matt May:** I think there's this idea of needing to be validated for the for the work that if you are, if you're saying that you're an inclusive person and you're very empathetic and you've

done this thing, and then you're sitting there waiting to receive your laurels for being a good person, that any criticism of this just takes the mask right off.

That suddenly I had a tweet about this, of the the woman's screaming at the cat of the, like the empathetic person does something and says, actually that's problematic. And then immediately they're like, oh, I am a good person! That just shows the ego that's involved in that whole interaction that, it's not about the person that you ostensibly were supposed to be helping at all.

It's about how good that makes you, and that ends up making things worse in a lot of cases than if you had ever left it alone.

[00:52:15] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. I was talking to my little brother who's technically my stepbrother and he was just lamenting on, like he really wants to help his sister. Cause she she wanted to go to law school, but now it seems like she just goes to work and then goes home and then that's all she ever does. And his mother who has a visual impairment and like trying to help her and he like decided to move back in and make sure he can cook for them and this and that.

And he was like, I just want to make sure they have a better life, they do better. And I told him like, I just want you to realize that while you think you're doing the right thing, but what you're really doing is you're selfish. And what you're doing is that you're saying that this is my view of what I think they should be doing. And because of that, I'm going to push them to do the things that I think, as opposed to saying hey, are they happy with where they are now? If yes, then let them be happy. Allow them to live. Because you feel bad, you feel anxious. You have this guilt for having some level of success yourself because you're selfish and you want to reflect yourself in your other family members.

And so in doing so, if they're not reaching that, then you feel the obligation to help them. The equivalent of oh, look at these savages, let me help show them the word of God. It's the same thing. I think that we do it in product design and UX all the time.

Like we always had this thing of, oh there's a predetermined path that we tell people, this is the right path. This is the golden path. And that's what you should take. And then someone comes

back and takes a different path and say, hey, that path is broken. Or that path doesn't feel right. And you blame the user.

You blame the person as opposed to understanding that actually, maybe you did the wrong thing. And it's like a math class, I used to hate this. Whereas you have an equation. Teacher tells you to solve it, you solve it and you get the exact right answer. But because you didn't use the specific equation that they gave you to solve it, then it's wrong. But is the ultimate goal to get the answer or the process to get to the answer? Because I'm going to get to it as quickly as I can. And so I think we certainly do look at people who like humans who use our products the same way. They will navigate and find things, specific and unique ways.

So how do we create as many avenues to get there without over-bloating the product and making it overly complex? And I think there is a balance there. Like I think Adobe is a good example. I use Illustrator all the time. I know there's two ways to get to the the arrow tool. Either I can hit A, or I can go over to the left bar and click on the thing and then I'll select it, but at least there's a couple of ways for me to get there. And whichever one makes sense for me is. But it doesn't force me down just one specific pathway.

[00:54:47] **Matt May:** Yeah. Having multiple different ways to complete something, and that takes time to understand, to absorb. And it doesn't happen all at once. It requires listening. If it had just been invented and here, it's this is what we have to offer you, this, that sort of the cathedral model of developing systems, the results are you get what you get.

And I think that just the fact that software is easy to evolve compared to construction of buildings or things like that. That we have a lot more of a responsibility to make sure that we're reaching people where they're at. So I want to take one quick break and then I want to come back and talk about hopes and dreams for the future.

We'll be right back with Timothy Bardlavens.

On the next episode of InEx:

[00:55:38] **Aimi Hamraie:** Every year I go and do a little talk on neurodiversity for the first year psych residents at my university. And this is the kind of stuff I talked to them about. It's like, no, you have to like, actually talk to people who have lived experience about what we want. And don't assume that psychiatric medication is like the end all be all of access. Cause it's, it's really not.

[00:56:04] **Matt May:** A conversation with Aimi Hamraie.

All right. We are back with Timothy Bardlavens. And, um, we're going to start talking about speculative futures.

As we were talking about creating inclusive and equitable environments, creating inclusive and equitable products, there comes a question of, how do we create those structures? Where would they need to be created? And I broke these up a little bit as, how do you take an organization that's already operating in a certain way and make the changes that are necessary to have something where everybody feels that they are participating equally, equitably. And that's kind of the hard one.

I think maybe we should tackle that first. Because this is probably if people are listening and thinking about their organizations, the question that's probably on most of their minds is, what do I do as an individual contributor? What do I do as a lower mid-level manager? Somebody that's not the CEO that could just say, hey, guess what? We're going to change our way of working to this. From that bottom up, grassroots, how do we start to instill a sense of equity in the work that we're doing, in the work that we output?

[00:57:27] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Okay. I'm giving you a transparent response. And it's you don't. The reason why I say that is I think the problem with the eye is that it is always aggressive effort, right? Like it's always a small set of people who want to grow it into a bigger thing. And then there might be a program that's created, but then HR takes over it and then it gets bastardized or whatever the case may be, same narrative all the time. And so, you don't.

I think if you are an individual contributor and you don't believe in the work that you're doing is equitable, or you don't believe that the organization itself is equitable, or whatever the case may

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be, find a new job. Because you don't have the power to make the changes and you are going to create so much harm for yourself by trying to go against the grain.

And you might be successful. You might find allies or you might just be disillusioned or want to leave anyway. And that's what happened with me the first time I tried to do this work. I think that if you're a middle manager, then you have a bit more power. I would think about what is your power within your circle, being your core team that you're supporting as well as maybe your peers in other allies that may be around your peers, as well as folks who are within your direct leadership chain, you could potentially influence in some meaningful way. I think that where the real change happens, isn't in middle management. Like at first I thought that was like the layer that was really broken. But in actuality, I think the layer that's actually broken is in upper management in like the director level.

Cause VPs are too far. They don't really know. They can't really see, they have aspirational visions, but they're not actually tracking progress usually when it comes to these types of things and they like the things that they're graded on a very different. And so where it makes the most difference to me is that director level, because they do have a closer look at the results. They have a closer look at the work while also being able to see pretty broadly across an organization, as opposed to middle management. They are so deeply focused on the work itself that many times they have to figure out is this a choice of the work or the people or something else. And so I think that's the thing to assess is like these directors, what are you doing?

And how are you setting the example and how are you hiring leaders who should be doing the work and how are you advocating using your power? Because directors have a very broad set of powers that aren't, that isn't given to everyone managers, senior managers. Okay, can you do within your circle, your sphere of influence and how can you drive that forward?

Whether it's through your teams or through your peers in their teams sees, how can you, if you would like, if you feel safe, how do you bubble up concerns or feedback, and in doing so, see if you have leaders who are responsible of this. And I see all those things as a preface, but in actuality, again, you go back to the like the employee life cycle this is a multi-pronged effort.

And so to build equitable products, that means that you have to not only look at who are you hiring, promoting, or letting go. But also excuse me, you have to look at that in addition to looking at where does the work actually come from? Who's building. The priorities. How are those things being gauged?

How are we building metrics? Do the metrics support, or do they come against what you're trying to achieve? If they go against it, then how do you build it and bring in other metrics? So some folks you have, like some companies, you have a quantitative and qualitative metric. And so how can you have balance between those two things?

The right organization has done the work to understand what is the quantitative and qualitative metrics that we want to associate with more equitable products, as well as more equitable organizations. We have directors who are hiring leaders who have that right focus and they're leveraging their power to enact real programs across the organization.

And then we have middle managers who are continuing to grow their sphere of influence in being able to both bubble down the things that needs to go downward, but also bubbling up the information that's coming from their teams. And ultimately That should hopefully influence VPs in the C-suite who many times aren't telling you what metrics attract and they're asking you to develop them.

And so the directors should be able to bubble up and say, hey, this is where we believe it's important and what we believe we're actually doing really well and where we believe we have gaps in, they can work with VPs to build out that strategy and then build out the narrative, the corporate narrative around that, which is then ultimately it becomes external to shareholders, to users, to whomever else.

In my mind, that's actually the right way to approach it. When it comes to this sort of organizational shifts, it has to be at the director level which then has the power to drive up and down.

[01:02:27] **Matt May:** Yeah. As you were talking about this, I was thinking about the NFL's Rooney rule. The idea that for hiring a head coach that you needed to basically interview one racial

minority candidate. And the effect of that has been a lot of, I guess, drive-bys, like courtesy interviews that have resulted in head coaches' times, if they were Black and they were hired as a head coach in the NFL being short and not having the same kinds of opportunities.

These little ideas of quick fixes are the things that stick with me. There's a culture problem in the league. And finding one kind of bandaid over that problem. Doesn't make it go away. It doesn't get to the heart of the problem. It's complicated and it takes time to change cultures. It requires a lot of people to put effort in. And as you were talking about what it takes out of you and encouraging people to quit, that's something that I do too, actually.

My number one advice to people who are stagnating in their careers is, don't set yourself on fire to keep other people warm. If you are the only one that is trying to make this work inclusive, to try to diversify an organization, to try to make them focus on something other than making more money, then, you know, there comes a certain point where you just have to realize you're beating your head against a wall, and that there are other places that you are going to be more receptive to that kind of work.

What that resonates most with, in the people that I talk with, are basically gen Z and the newest generation of people that are coming into the industry because they have an ethical point of view, generally, that is really well evolved. They want to be doing work that aligns with their ethical values.

And I don't know if you've seen the same kind of thing, but if you are looking for a culture change, finding it in people who actually have that passion and represent an entire generation of people that are going to coming into to the workplace that you it's going to be hard to pick apart the overall groundswell of that need for the work that you do to have some kind of ethical alignment. Have you seen that too?

[01:04:42] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Absolutely. Even I'm trying to get better about. I've heard people talk all the time around hey, I love this company, it's so mission driven, it's mission driven. Like I love the mission, its mission. And for a long time, even personally, I'm like, I don't really care about the mission.

I just care about am I going to get paid well? And is it generally just not like killing babies and stuff? Is it like just generally an okay kind of environment? But I'm seeing more and more there is this phrase of mission driven and caring about the mission and caring about the impact that I'm seeing.

And when I'm talking to especially new grads it's so interesting. Because of course working at Meta, there's a ton of opinions about the company and its impact on society and et cetera. And part of the conversation I have to have with people is usually around it's usually something is around hey, It's sometimes it's not where we are, but where we can go, or where you want us to go or where you believe we should go.

And you're like, I don't know, it's this dance that I see a lot of people having to do now of, okay. I want to be a change maker. Can I join a company and be able to be the change should that I see. Or can I'm not really sure about, the more like the ethics of this or the impact of this on people.

How do I like make that decision? Or a lot of folks are like, hey, I don't want to go into big tech because I just don't feel like it does great things for the world. And I want to do work that is more impactful and so on and so forth. And then I have to the biggest challenge that I've been having is really in explaining how to get people, to shift their perspective on it.

Like for example, there's one person who I was talking to, who recently accepted an offer to Meta on the stories team. And at first he was like, I'm not sure if I want to join that team because I really care about helping support people who want to build community, and to help people build community and connect with people like them, so on and so forth.

And so one thing I had explained to him was if you think about stories, you think about most young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 give or take. They're using stories because they like they like the quick sort of access to like quick snips of sharing their life restore or their journeys, whatever.

And most people, especially small businesses are leveraging stories as a way to get their workout or get their products out in the world. And so by you actually supporting that team, there's actually a trickle effect or like a connection to actual people in the real world who are leveraging

the product in this specific way, to be able to connect with community, to be able to articulate their story, to be able to sell their products and build their business.

And so I think the biggest challenge I've seen is getting people to understand a level deeper. Because I do see gen Z is especially as being really anchored on ethics, morals, and like the impact on the world. But I think that part of the challenge is that sometimes they look at in a very surface level and it's like, how do we, how do I help you take it a level deeper?

Like how do I be a good custodian of the work and have the opportunity to say there's one level deeper? And if you go one level deeper and you're doing the work and it doesn't feel right, then how do you make a decision on what you want to do next? Because the other part that I try to explain to folks, especially Black folks who tell me, hey, I just don't want to work for another company where I'm the only Black person on the team.

And I tell them all the time, sorry, that's just always going to be the case for the most part. That's just going to be what it is you have to live with it. The thing is what does it feel like being on that team? Are you actually going to be supported, developed, grown, or not? Have these conversations that these folks want to have they're anchored on.

And I don't think we talk about power enough when it comes to equity, when it comes to ethics and all these other things, like it's just a power thing. And so as much as you see this groundswell of gen Z as, especially who and really I'll say gen Z and the younger millennials, I think you see this groundswell of these folks, like asking these really hard questions of preexisting structures and organizations, and like really wanting them to have impact.

But also they get really frustrated quickly because they don't have the power to enact the change that they believe in. And that's where the next thing is how do you identify leaders who are doing that and say, hey, I want to work for them or model myself around them or whatever. I think that's the thing that has helped me be successful as a hiring manager.

Model what a lot of people want to see. And so they feel more comfortable with taking a week to come to a place like Meta that they feel like isn't for them because they see someone like me

working there, who's still doing the work. So then it becomes, okay, we have a groundswell that they don't have power.

So how do we, as older millennials, gen Xers, boomers, all those looks like, how do we, and the higher generations or older generations actually start modeling those behaviors that give them sort of that, that hope that things can shift and that people do care. Cause I don't think we communicate enough about how much we do care.

We just do the work in silence and no one really knows that we're actually doing the work.

[01:09:37] **Matt May:** Yeah. Yeah, that's true. I think it's hard really to even open up to talk about that with people as they're coming in. Because there's a sense of the party line, right? There's the things that you say to your employees and not getting into the personal stuff.

And that kind of reinforces that barrier. The safety to actually extend yourself in that space is one thing. But also if everybody is kind of in their own box, having their own issues and everyone is uncomfortable expressing them to one another, then the stagnation there can be unbearable.

[01:10:15] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. Yeah. It's such an interesting thing. This is such an interesting phenomenon and sorta like shift that we're seeing happen in the workforce and how people approach work. And I'm curious to see how it shows up in like in the near future, because I would say in the next decade, not near future, I say the next decade, because I feel as though a lot of us in the like millennial generation.

Are like really many of us are like really annoyed with, let's say, especially folks who are in the more baby boomers, boomer generation, and even like the older gen Xers because we're like, hey, get out of the way. We want to be there now. We are ready to take the reins.

And then again, interested to see how, when millennials are more solidly in those executive and C-suite roles and you have more gen Z who are in those like middle management roles. It's just to see how the industry changes, or if it changes, or if there's some kind of reversion that happens of, I learned from this leader what to do.

So now I'm going to do that thing. And it just becomes like a continuation.

[01:11:19] **Matt May:** Yeah, I'm fascinated about this. And I think that as long as we're not sort of ruled by crypto barons by that point, I'm really interested in the evolution. Like, what are the structures that need to stay, and what need to go?

I want to wrap up by giving you the opportunity to highlight people that you think of that our listeners should be looking into, people you think are doing great work, that are doing inclusive, equitable work, advocacy, research?

[01:11:44] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yeah. There's so many people out in the world. I would say of course I'd always shout out. My best friend first and foremost, Antionette Carroll. If people don't know her, then you're living under a rock because she is literally the best. And then I'll also say there's a really, an amazing person named Demma Rosa Rodriguez, who she's the head of community safety, trust and safety at Meta.

But even before that she'd built the team and the equity engineering team at Google, like amazing person to just know of and then, there's us co also Vivianne Castillo, who's like the best. She, she's now leading full time, HmntyCntrd, and which is an amazing organization.

And I think it's really great if nothing else, like I've learned a ton just about like, how to think about organizational trauma, organizational betrayal. What does that even look like? How do you heal from it? How do you like all those things are just like really interesting. It's just like different.

Like, she approaches a lot of these topics, especially when it comes to people's lived experiences within organizations from the place of therapy, because she used to be a therapist. And so she has a very clinical way of looking at it while also mixing in her experience, coming from a theology background will also look coming through like her research background and working in these big corporations and so amazing. Like even just go to LinkedIn or to Twitter and just look at some of the video clips from it, just amazing and really intriguing conversation.

[01:13:11] **Matt May:** We'll put links in to the show notes.

[01:13:13] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yes. Three amazing Black women.

[01:13:15] **Matt May:** Thank you so much for participating. I really appreciate all our conversations, but I think this is the first one that's been recorded. So, thank you. And we have more to come.

[01:13:27] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Yes.

[01:13:28] **Matt May:** I'm looking forward to seeing what's next for you and, yeah, we're going to keep in touch.

[01:13:33] **Timothy Bardlavens:** Thank you, thank you.

[01:13:34] **Matt May:** That's our show. Show notes and transcripts for all InEx episodes are available at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. All episodes are released under Creative Commons Attribution, 4.0 International license. Thanks for listening.

Appendix D – Episode 4: Interview with Aimi Hamraie

[00:00:00] **Matt May:** This is InEx, a show about inclusive design. I'm your host, Matt May. In this episode:

[00:00:09] **Aimi Hamraie:** Every year I go and do a little talk on neurodiversity for the first year psych residents at my university. And this is the kind of stuff I talked to them about. It's like, no, you have to like, actually talk to people who have lived experience about what we want. And don't assume that psychiatric medication is like the end all be all of access. Cause it's, it's really not.

[00:00:35] **Matt May:** A conversation with Aimi Hamraie.

It is my great pleasure to welcome Professor Aimi Hamraie to the podcast. Thank you for joining us here.

[00:00:48] **Aimi Hamraie:** Thanks so much for having me.

[00:00:49] **Matt May:** Aimi Hamraie, they/them, is associate professor of medicine, health, and society and American studies at Vanderbilt University, and director of the Critical Design Lab. Trained as a feminist scholar, Hamraie's i nterdisciplinary research spans critical disability studies, science and technology studies, critical design, and urbanisms, critical race theory, and the environmental humanities. They're author of Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, and host of the Contra* podcast on disability and design. With Kelly Fritsch, Mara Mills and David Serlin, Hamraie co-edited a special issue of *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* on crip technoscience. Hamraie's research is funded by the Social Science Research Council, the Smithsonian Institution, the Mellon Foundation, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Arts, and the National Humanities Alliance. They're quoted by the New York Times, the Chronicle of Higher Education, National Public Radio, the History Channel, the Huffington Post, ARTnews and others.

And here, I want to add the land acknowledgment before we begin. OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Huron-Wendat. Aimi and I are presently on the

ancestral and traditional territories of the Duwamish and Coast Salish Peoples, and the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Shawnee, and Muskogee or Creek people, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we stand and create.

I want to talk about how you came up. What was the impetus for your original studies in feminist theory, and how that has evolved over time?

[00:02:24] **Aimi Hamraie:** Sure. I have kind of a weird trajectory, I guess, and I use weird in a good way. I started out being very interested in the relationships between bodies and built environments very broadly. There are personal reasons for this and also scholarly reasons. And I was, reading a lot of phenomenologies of architecture and things like that.

And at the same time, I had a very keen interest in disability studies. And feminist disability studies in particular. So when I was a graduate student at Emory University, which is in Georgia, I was working with Rosemary Garland-Thompson, who is one of the founders of disability studies in the humanities and feminist disability studies in particular.

And I was very lucky to be in a program that had very interdisciplinary training requirements. And in addition to pretty rigorous feminist theory training, we also had to take methods courses and specific disciplines. I was able to take methods courses, not only in history and anthropology, but also in architecture. And so I spent a summer semester at the Harvard GSD and I took courses at Georgia Tech.

Really, it was thinking a lot about the question of, how do architects think about their users? What are they imagining when they're trying to understand who's going to use something? And I learned all sorts of interesting things from just being in the architecture studio and and noticing what are the norms and forms of discipline and knowledge that circulate there.

I ended up doing a dissertation project about the history of universal design and architecture. And then when I graduated and adapted my dissertation, rewrote it as a book, I expanded to also include fields like industrial design and all of the ways that the term universal design has taken on resonance and carried through very different fields. I currently teach at Vanderbilt University. I've been there eight and a half years, and I teach in an interdisciplinary pre-med program called

medicine, health, and society. And basically our students take science courses, but they also take courses and the history and anthropology of medicine, sociology of health, et cetera.

And so I teach disability studies in that program, and I've been very lucky to get to work with really great colleagues who, you know, their interests intersect with mine in very interesting ways and kind of push me to think about things a little bit differently. And so while I've been at Vanderbilt, I also started the Critical Design Lab as a kind of alternative space to what is very prevalent on many campuses, campus maker spaces. But also the sorts of disability, assistive technology labs that get lots and lots of funding from the Department of Defense and create high-tech prosthetics and things like that. And I was getting a lot of students coming to me, wondering how they might approach design and technology through a more social model perspective and less of a kind of what Ashley Shue calls a techno-ableist perspective.

And so the lab grew from there, and I kind of took on all of these different types of projects that I was not anticipating doing originally. Learned GIS for mapping, and I co-curated an art exhibit, and I've done a lot of different types of accessibility consulting and things like that.

[00:06:23] **Matt May:** Bringing up the social model, I think this is a great opportunity. I think a lot of the people that are going to be listening to this have not really engaged with disability from a models perspective. It's been experiential in its framing. I want to break down the social models of specifically, because it does end up being tied into the idea of universal design of inclusive design.

To separate that out: we have the medical model, that the disability is reflected by a threshold level, below which one is disabled. That can be your vision, your hearing, your cognition, motor function, you name it. And that it is essentially the responsibility, or at least it's the burden of the person that's disabled to raise themselves up to the level that they are peers in society, in any action that they want to do.

And the social model turns it on its head. I use the book Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language to talk about this. In Martha's Vineyard, up until the early 20th century, there was this village called Chilmark, where 25 to 30% of people had hereditary deafness. So the idea of sign language was not an accommodation. It was just simply a form of difference that everyone participated in equally. So if you spoke, if you signed, everybody knew that that was a part of the rule of play.

And so that kind of gets to the social model of this, which is, it is a disconnect between the person and the environment, but the responsibility doesn't sit only with an individual, that it is a societal failing to meet the needs of that person in that space. You can expand on that, definitely.

[00:08:01] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I agree with everything you said. And I think a lot of people in disability studies, which is my field, focus on elements of the medical model, the idea that it pathologizes disability instead of treating disability as difference. And I think you've also highlighted a really important part of it, which is that it's very individual.

So when we think about designing supports for disabled people, often in those kinds of like high-tech labs and things, it's not that there's something wrong with doing that. It's that it's very individualized. Someone who, for example, acquires a wheelchair that can climb the stairs, which is something that gets shown in the media a lot, that's just for that one person. It doesn't change the fact that everyone else who uses wheeled mobility is encountering those stairs and facing a barrier.

The other part of the medical model that I have done a lot of my own scholarly historical research is about, is the field of rehabilitation and the way that that field was responsible for framing disability in the 20th century as an occupational problem, like a threat to industry that needed to be corrected. There was this idea that there were functional and dysfunctional bodies. And if you were dysfunctional, you would either get rehabilitated or you would go on disability. And there are whole systems that are created around that.

From a social model perspective, or even taking that further, like the work that we do in the Critical Design Lab, is from a disability culture perspective. We say that design isn't just about functionality. It's also about art and creativity and aesthetics and shared belonging. So we're often creating things that do not make us better at our jobs in any way, but they give us access to a cultural experience. At the same time, what is at stake in all of that is justice. That's the social model part, but even further, a disability justice perspective that says, you know, we don't all have to be productive all the time or at all, in order to be recognized as valid and worthy human beings, whom society ought to care for and nourish and make life possible and enjoyable for us.

Those are some of the values that I would say are really central to my work as well, and that sometimes put me at odds with people who are working in the same space who are really focused on, for example, how do we get all the autistic people to work in high-tech industries and stuff like that. And I'm like, how do we get all the autistic people, like, the ability to take a nap and get some rest and not have to conform to society so much?

So, yeah.

[00:11:01] **Matt May:** Yeah. I was thinking about this just as you were talking about your model and I've heard, you know, the identity model of this. And talking from my perspective as an ADHDer, there's the trope of the superpower, right? I use this as like sliders, you know, it's controls on a big board, and the controls can be zero through 10,000, actually. The human capability is just on such a wide range, but the idea that somehow this disability is a magical power or something like that, which just feeds right back into that consumerist loop. That now I'm a more marketable thing because I can be a manager or whatever.

And I think the part that makes me gravitate more toward the identity model is that I want to say sometimes, this really sucks, you know? That this isn't something that I enjoy every aspect of. I don't enjoy all of the aspects of things that I have to bring with me to work that are not in my skillset.

I don't appreciate that there are times where I know in the day I'm mentally not fit to be doing the work, but I have to do it anyway. And that is a different kind of voice to bring to the situation. That it isn't just that you have to just sort of be the shiny, happy, remarkable ADHD person, but that you can be the normal, average ADHD person and still have value in society.

[00:12:29] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah, absolutely. The word that gets used for this often in a physical disability context is Super Crip. It's like, oh, look at all the genius stuff that that person's accomplishing. And the Super Crip never gets to talk about their access needs. They're basically just this wonder that is created for the comfort of non-disabled people.

I also have ADHD and I'm autistic and something that I have been noticing with great interest, is that during the pandemic, because of social media, a lot of people are starting to notice like, oh, I

have some ADHD traits. I should maybe look into this further or get an assessment. And I was talking to my partner the other day, who's in that category.

And she was like, Isn't it interesting that like, literally, so many people, everyone we know is suddenly like, do I have ADHD? But the world is created in such a neurotypical way and with such an neurotypical standards, and that sometimes we place those standards on each other because we're so inculturated in that world.

So as people develop identity around that, I think that really interesting things are happening. I've noticed that it's made it easier for me to talk about my access needs with people because they have more of a frame of reference because they watch someone's TikTok video or something like that. And I never thought that that's what it would take, but it makes sense because of the pandemic too. So many people are encountering new access needs that they didn't know they had because we are in an even more digital virtual kind of setting a lot of the time, or at least those of us who are working in knowledge industries.

I will be very interested to see how that identity shift changes the number of people who identify as disabled and how it might shift even kind of what is possible in terms of accessibility.

[00:14:32] **Matt May:** Yeah. I'm actually, I'm going off script now because this I think is important. Talking specifically about ADHD because in this whole, last two years, it's almost like at least the majority of us have had our own lab experiment. We've taken all of the stimulus away. So it's very easy to have ADHD masked in a place where there's so much noise, meeting after meeting after meeting, context switch after context switch, that now that people have sat still about it, then they see what's actually happening in their brains and their neurochemistry.

And in all of this time, literally for me, I have people come to me all the time talking about, "I think I might have ADHD," literally 90% of the people that I have talked to about this have been assigned female at birth. And it's the idea of ADHD was white boys, more or less in North America. And that was it.

There's two pieces to this first off, yes, welcome. There are systems of care for ADHD neurochemistries and there are medications. And there are behavioral treatments for that. And

then I also see like the second wave of this, where people who have received those supports then sort of retroactively come back and say if only I had been a boy when I was growing up.

And this is the part where I personally push back. Because the "treatments," quote unquote, that we received, if we were medicated in school, if we were given behavioral treatments in school, were not for our benefit. They were to make us more pliable and more docile, to keep us from being behavioral problems in school. And so that idea of there having been a great amount of privilege put in into this is, there's some societal aspect of that for that issue. But we also have to realize that when we talk about treatment, the treatment is for what purpose, right? That it is often because the dominant part of the culture wants us to behave in a certain way.

[00:16:46] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah, I completely agree with you. I remember when my younger brother was in elementary school and my parents really had to fight for him not to be put in situations of mandatory compliant behavior, or becoming medicated. And I spent a lot of my life being like I have similar access needs to people who are labeled as X, Y, and Z.

But it wasn't until I was older that I got a diagnosis. And even then it was just like a very weird experience, because I got a diagnosis in order to get accommodations at work. And the person who diagnosed me was like, accommodations, why would you want to do that? You can just take all these medications. But first you have to take this other one cause you have anxiety and like all of these things.

My experience of being medicated for ADHD was not great. And I actually opted to be unmedicated, which affects my life and how I navigate the world. And a lot of things are a lot harder for me, but I also feel more centered in myself. I'm able to be more neurodivergent in certain ways, because I don't take medication. It doesn't work for me. It doesn't work for my body.

But that thing about these treatments being framed as accommodations, I think, brings us back to the medical model too. Of course, that should be available to people who want it, and some people don't want it and some people do. But at the same time, there's so much more that we could be doing in terms of access that even just on the level of recognizing that people's brains work differently and creating environments that support that. Or creating social norms that don't say, hey, act this way, pay attention this way. Sit at a meeting for three hours, you know, like all of

that stuff. We could be having better cultures of accessibility that are informed by and based on the access needs of people who have ADHD, even before we got to the issue of medication.

I've been very frustrated at times with healthcare providers who don't know how to write an accommodations letter, because what they think is that medication fixes you. So why would you need to ask your boss for more time on X, Y, and Z, when you could just make your brain work faster. And to me, that goes against the spirit of the ADA, like completely. It's like they need ADA training. They need to understand that that even exists and is something that they could do. So that's something I've thought about a lot.

Every year I go and do a little talk on neurodiversity for the first year psych residents at my university. And this is the kind of stuff I talked to them about. It's like, no, you have to like, actually talk to people who have lived experience about what we want.

And don't assume that psychiatric medication is like the end all be all of access. Cause it's, it's really not. It helps in certain ways up to a point, but that doesn't stop all of these other expectations and norms from being placed on us.

[00:19:59] **Matt May:** Yeah, one of my recent LinkedIn posts, of all places for me to talk about this, is LinkedIn. I mentioned that I've been on medication for the last two or three years, and it's probably the fourth time that I've tried. And I had sort of hit a wobble. I was changing things up too much and it was just leaving me exhausted, lower than my baseline functionality, and the ability for me to just stop, take a beat, realize I'm not going to achieve everything that I need to do for the next week. And then come back up. It's something that just being honest about, like having the ability to do that without, nobody's going to fire me for saying something like that. That itself is liberating because it lets people say it's more than just, oh, take that pill and you'll be fine. There's so much more to doing that.

I had that as one of the treatments that was given to me, and it doesn't do anything except make you more hyper, you know? It made me able to goof off more efficiently. There wasn't anything inherent in this pill. And even for autism, getting the diagnosis is just kind of like, okay, so you have autism, these are the supports that are available to you, but there's no medication. There are

no, there's no real common thing. It's really, it's an entree into understanding what the individual aspects of that mean for you.

And from there, the self agency has to come in, because now you can actually articulate, this is why I don't like being in a loud and noisy room. This is why fragrances affect me. That helps you to explain that situation. But if you're still doing it in front of a monolith, something that's not going to change at all, then that doesn't really bring you any closer to justice, just to simply know yourself.

[00:21:45] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah, absolutely. And you know, I think that I had this idea in my head because I had been masking for so long and living with my suspicions as like a secret, or my self identification as a secret, except to my closest people. I really thought that, when I got a diagnosis, I would just be like, okay, everybody, and like come out. And then there would just be all these people waiting for me to come join in community with them. What I actually found was that pretty much all of us are really traumatized by all the experiences that we've had to navigate. And there is not as much kind of shared collective community experience around it as it could be.

And I think that that's something that's really changing now. I think that that has to do with the kind of popularization of the discourse around neurodivergence or people being very clear and identifying that way from much earlier on. So some of that is shifting the way that power operates or the risks that are posed to publicly identifying in certain ways.

And then of course there's the issue of who has the privilege to not talk about stuff like that. There are people who are pathologized and policed and their divergence from the norm is not as easily masked. Not only gender, but also racial dimensions to that. So I just think about all of that a lot. My ideal is that disability culture is a framework that we can relate to through our identities in a more collective way. And that's just not always possible. That tells us the work that we have to do to make the world a place where that could be possible one day.

[00:23:36] **Matt May:** And I think that dovetails into the idea of crip technoscience. So I want to get into that specifically, because this was a term that you have put forth. And I think that the important part of this is that agency that you have that in order for there to be some kind of affirmative technoscience around disability, there have to be people that have agency in that

space. Then it becomes a dialectic. There's a community that's going about it on their own. And sort of brings back what they found. And its connection to mutual aid, of disabled people helping and supporting one another, and finding a practice for doing a certain thing on their own. I'd like for you to talk about that, to expose the political commitments of crip technoscience and so forth, if you could.

[00:24:34] **Aimi Hamraie:** So the word technoscience comes from the field of science and technology studies, and it describes the way that any designed thing or technology that is created relies on certain forms of knowledge and specifically science, but science isn't just what experts do in a lab. There are also forms of science that come from communities of experience.

So the disability activists in the sixties and seventies who were reclaiming the word crip, they were also doing a whole lot of design of technology, of architecture, urban design, urban planning, and they were doing this from the perspective that disabled people ought to have access to the broader mainstream society.

But shouldn't have to accept the norms and standards of that society, especially the standards that say that disabled people all must become hyper productive and hyper-able. I use the term crip technoscience in my work, and in my book Building Access to look at some of those histories of how disabled people not only create our own designs and our own technologies, but also do it towards specific political ends.

And this is what distinguishes this concept from just a kind of DIY design approach or some of the other. That are really useful, that exists. Like Arseli Dokumaci's concept of micro activist affordances, which she uses to analyze what happens when in a home kind of relationship between a disabled people, a disabled person and a family member, when they're like adapting tools for daily use and coming up with different ways of relating. I am really interested in crip technoscience as something that operates on a different scale and for different publics.

And that includes those things for sure, but has a specific anti normative kind of agenda and that's the crip part as well. And so there are so many examples of this. Some are historical, some are more contemporary. But they all point to kind of disability culture perspective on technology, I would say.

[00:27:02] **Matt May:** I think a part of this is about the means of making, of creating. And I think you talk about knowing-making. Maybe you can talk about this and I want to throw a layer onto that. Jutta Treviranus, my advisor, head of the Inclusive Design Research Centre talks about epistemicide, the idea of the destruction of the means of knowing of learning things and who gets to decide how something is made or how knowledge is created is a critical aspect of this.

[00:27:37] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah, absolutely. Part of what is significant about crip technoscience historically, and in the present, is that it's a response to that rehabilitation and medical model episteme. A lot of the people who were pushing for accessibility in architecture, in technology, in a lot of the 20th century, were not just disabled people, but also these experts who spoke in the name of disabled people, often with very nationalist and capitalist values.

And so it was very important for disabled people to be able to refuse medical models, to refuse the systems of classification and diagnosis, and to propose alternative methods. So at the same time that they were doing all this design work, they were also doing things like coordinating resources and access and personal care attendants.

People were becoming nurses so that they could care for other disabled people. People were becoming architects so that they could design for other disabled people. The generation of a knowledge base as an alternative kind of field or system of knowledge was really central and important.

And we see this happening in the contemporary contexts in so many ways, I think, we were talking about ADHD earlier. Something that I've really benefited from is talking to my friends who also are neurodivergent in different ways and struggle with executive function, to share our hacks and our tools that we use and what works for us and what doesn't. Or what do we do about the side effects of certain medical treatments or, things like that. And that's the same sort of thing. It's like people creating an alternative knowledge base because what is afforded and the kind of mainstream medical context, doesn't go far enough to meet our needs.

[00:29:38] **Matt May:** Great. We're going to take a pause here and we'll be right back with Aimi Hamraie.

InEx is a major research project by me, Matt May, as part of the master of design degree program at OCAD University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Episodes and transcripts of this podcast can be found at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. Follow InEx on Twitter at @inexpodcast.

Okay. We're back. And I want to talk about universal design as a terminology and its connection to inclusive design. The book that you wrote talks about the universal design as its practice historically in the built environment. I wrote a book in 2008 with Wendy Chisholm called Universal Design for Web Applications that sort of tried to apply those principles to the web as it was in 2008, for what it's worth. So, my name had been associated with universal design as a result of that. And my evolution toward inclusive design changed as I realized some of the impacts and the histories of it.

But maybe you could talk about how you experienced it, and the ups and downs of it.

[00:30:46] **Aimi Hamraie:** Sure. I think I first encountered the term universal design when I was in graduate school, studying disability studies and then being exposed to people where I lived, who did that work.

But as I investigated it from a historical perspective, initially I was going to do an ethnography of a universal design lab. So I was going to go into the lab and be like, okay, what is actually the method of universal design? How are they doing this?

And I got there and I noticed that people either did one of two things. They either repeated back the same words about what universal design was. And almost, there were talking points. I was noticing that there was this kind of oh, it's this and it's that. And it benefits everyone and whatever. And I was wondering, okay, how do I critically unpack this a little bit?

And I was getting very different accounts of historical background because so many of the people that developed this concept are still alive and still working. And it's really, I am the same age as the term universal design. The first time that Ronald Mace, the disabled architect published about it in 1985, that was the year that I was born. And so I was thinking a lot about, what is the history of this very recent concept and where might parts of it have been found earlier and how might its meaning have changed?

What I discovered when I was doing the research for my book, which ended up being more historical but also based in interviews and ethnographic data is that before this term was used, there were other terms that were used to mean a similar kind of thing.

So barrier-free design and architecture for a long time described the idea that there are architectural barriers and they should be removed for greater accessibility. And then if we did that, it would benefit everyone, not just disabled people. And then, through the work of the disability rights movement, there was a lot of activism to get barrier-free design to be a mandate of the law.

And there were several laws before the Americans with Disabilities Act that tried to mandate this and failed. And then the ADA happened and it was much bigger and toothier and all of this stuff. And the concept of universal design in architecture emerged five years prior to the ADA.

So in this time when architects disabled architects and their allies were trying to figure out, okay, what are we going to do to get architects in general, to even think about accessibility? And they were creating seminars for the, through the American Institute of Architects and doing continuing education and all of these things.

And they were just throwing out all of these options just to see what would stick, and universal design was one of them. It was a rhetorical move to say okay, what if we call it this? And what if we say this, this and this. Then the ADA passed and suddenly everything was about compliance with the law.

A compliance framework, it's a type of accountability. It's good. It says, here's the bare minimum you have to do. It's transformative. It has a huge impact. But at the same time, people were treating it as this thing that they begrudgingly had to do. So the people who are advocating for universal design were like, okay, let's go back to this term and say, this is what we do when we go beyond compliance. When we go beyond the law. That's not what it meant originally at all. Originally it just meant that when you designed for disabled people, you benefit non-disabled people as well.

And in that time, like from the late 1990s, when the principles of universal design were created in 1997 through now, like 25 years later, there's just been a lot of experimentation. And this concept very quickly went into technology, web accessibility. I would say in some ways there has been much more like iteration in that world and that format and media than there has been in architecture, and has taken on so many different meetings.

And as there's new terminology or other terminology that is preferred because there's so much baggage associated. No one wants to claim the concept of the universal. There's a lot of critique of the idea that a design could really benefit everyone. And like, why would we say that? Why wouldn't we try to create better designs for people's specific needs? And it's probably just not as useful as it was originally intended to be, but I also don't think that a lot of the people who use the term originally were that wedded to it, necessarily. They were just being like, all right, what happens if we say this, oh, this corporation is going to take this up and that's better than what they were doing before.

So let's see what they do with that. I don't think that anybody was necessarily hanging their hat on universal design producing disability justice to the fullest extent possible. But now that we have other frameworks and goals, we can look back on that history more critically and notice where did it work and where did it maybe have some other consequences.

[00:36:11] **Matt May:** Yeah. And one of those consequences that I can think of, and is probably the reason that universal design caught on at the time that it did, because there was a civil rights piece of legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Act that's there. And then there was the definition of, what do you mean by that?

And so that's where we get the ADA Architectural Guidelines, ADAAG, and the idea of creating a baseline that everybody has to meet, makes it easy for there to be a way to satisfy those requirements. It's code compatible.

And a lot of what ends up happening from that point forward is that it's not even called universal design anymore. It's just called architecture. You need to do this and this in order to meet the requirements to open your building. And this is where I think the most damage happens. None of it was, I think, intentional, but what I see with disability rights juxtaposed against any other form

of human difference is that disability rights end up being about compliance, and then all other forms of civil rights tend to be about equality, more nebulously defined, but about economic access. Ability to work, to participate in society, et cetera. So when you take this into computer science, to developing software, we have accessibility as this thing, which is a legal requirement and has the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines behind it, then we have inclusion, representation, kinds of issues for for everything outside of disability, for the most part.

And that leaves two huge gaps, right? That the actual representation and inequality issue in the disability sphere is ignored and also any real access issues that might affect any other community is also ignored.

We've turned it into a technical policy. And then in doing that, we've extracted the humanity of, or the individuality of all of the stakeholders in the community, which in itself is immensely diverse.

[00:38:23] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah. This is, exactly. Like, this is a really good example of the concept of knowing-making, because the reason why that has happened is because there is such a functionalist understanding of disability and accessibility has been reduced to a usability problem. And this happens, I think a little bit with designing for gender inclusivity sometimes too, where it's, okay there's this body. It's different from the norm. How does it work? How do we solve? Like how do we engineer a technical solution that would solve this?

That same approach has been used since the mid 19th century to think about disability in industrial contexts. Industrial managers in the 19th century were like, okay, gotta make the efficient factories. Oh, there are these bodies that are different. Bodies are not standard. They're such wildcards. We have to control their difference and standardize them and make everyone work and produce the same. That means that there isn't a justice centered understanding of disability shaping how accessibility codes operate.

And it's a little different in the architectural or urban context. Cause it is about, okay, like how do we make sure the environment is able to be adaptive and usable for all the different kinds of people who might use it. But even then, everything is based on a specific knowledge base, on some citation of scientific evidence. And so it is fraught and that way because it is often not based

on how disabled people actually understand ourselves and what we want. And even if it was, it would probably only represent some people and not everybody. And this is the thing that is tricky about design and producing things that are for mass consumption or use.

An alternative to a kind of checklist or standardization approach that goes in a totally different direction is what, in my lab, we call protocols. There's a concept of protocol and design, which is like, what are the standard steps you might take towards producing something? But also in many cultural contexts, there are protocols that are like, how do we behave towards each other? How do we treat our elders? Who is respected? How are people treated as human beings?

A lot of our design work has creating protocols for helping people come into the middle of a design situation and ask more critical questions about it. Not just to produce something that's really functional, that works and is usable, but something that kind of *doesn't* work. And then you're left being like, oh wait, what, how do I do this? This is obviously not working for this purpose. Like, how do I how do I work out this problem? And I think it's very productive in a non-capitalist sense to be put in that kind of situation. To be put in like a difficult situation and have to reach for, how do I learn more and connect more with disability communities in order to solve this problem, that is not solvable? Just on the basis of a normative assumption of how people use.

[00:41:32] **Matt May:** That is actually really a great segue into the definition of inclusive design. And so we can talk about this, that for inclusive design research center, the definition is:

"Inclusive design is design that is inclusive of the full range of human diversity with respect to language, culture, gender, age, and other forms of human difference."

And as far as the methodology behind it, there's always, "is there a checklist for inclusive design?" No, that's not the point. The idea is not a bell curve or, trying to refine by 1% what the average person can do.

It is looking for the most unaverage, the people that have been left out of the system, and working from the outside, in, in terms of the capabilities instead of the inside out. I look at it as like a bell curve from the top. There are the people that we refer to as marginalized, and the reason that they're there is that the system was not designed for them.

Thinking about it from the outside, looking at the range of abilities and access points to the system really defines that. I think of tax season as a really great example of this. Just, there are so many different, like loopholes, tricks, tips, things that you need to know there that are opaque to so many people, because the information isn't there, or that there's so much of it that is difficult to process.

And so a lot of these things that we say, oh, we created a tax credit for this. What if you didn't make any money? What if you're outside of the economic system? What if you're just not able to spend the time to find the things, to get the support. Or, me, I'm distracted and I don't keep notes very well of the things that I paid for.

So the system itself is not designed for us. It's designed for tax preparing companies to get more money out of us. It's finding what actually would work for the greatest number of people that accommodates all of the ways in which things go wrong, gives you the set of things to evaluate, to find the best pathway forward instead of saying we're going to meet this bar that was defined 35 years ago for this purpose.

[00:43:44] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah. I think it's really helpful to name an aspirational goal that is so broad and requires so many layers of consideration because it also enables designers to tap into different types of knowledge bases than what they would typically consider. To use the example of architecture, like ergonomics, the way that many people were designing physical objects and spaces for 80 years of the 20th century was based on anthropometric data that was taken from World War II soldiers. And that was very limited and had to be updated.

But if we're going beyond just like how much space does someone take up inside of a car or their clothing or whatever. And we're talking about things like culture, that means that designers have to read ethnographies and they have to have a really complex and critical understanding of culture and and learn about how to not be reductive or learn how to question the concept of objectivity.

And these are all good. Things to do when you have the power to shape the world. And they're also very frustrating things to do because they don't give you easy answers for, what do you build with it? My dad is an engineer, so he's always, when I talk about my work, he's, okay, but what do

you build with it? What if you can't build with it, this thing and it, that informs the stuff that you do.

The architect Joel Sanders did this amazing project called Stalled with his design firm, where they created a prototype for an airport bathroom, that incorporates different kinds of disability access, different sorts of things around caretaking of children and our family members. There are places for people to do ritual ablutions for prayer, all sorts of stuff, and it addresses safety and privacy, within the container of a bathroom. I thought the way that they did it and all the people they brought on board to inform it, and the types of research that they did were really interesting because what they came up with was something that maybe in practice will not be perfect to use, but in its form and in its background explorations reveals how the bathroom itself is a space that is intersected by gender and culture and race and disability and religion and all of these things. And so it sets a different standard for what can then be designed in the future and what forms of knowledge have to shape it. To me, that's the way to create new norms, to go beyond compliance by showing within the material form, all the forms of knowledge that had to shape that thing.

[00:46:39] **Matt May:** As you were talking about this, what really gets me about this is, you actually need to be in dialogue with people, and it's not something that a lot of people are really comfortable with and that discomfort ends up being something that perpetuates injustice. That you, if you do not have community with somebody, and you're talking to them about an issue specific to being trans, to being a wheelchair user, to any aspect of that difference. Then you will drive the conversation more toward the mainstream part of this and you will start to marginalize the difference between yourself and the person that you're talking to. And a lot of people respond to that by not doing the work. That it's easy to just pull yourself out of that conversation and then just really look at it from above and say, oh we're helping.

A part of that is just, I think designers need to be at least mini-researchers. That's my perspective on this. They need to actually understand if not at a deep methodological level, how to conduct meaningful, actionable research. But the ability to have the conversations that when somebody is raising an issue about something that any given designer is able to respond, and to understand that concern, not to be empathetic and it becomes a skill of yours, that you become the expert in something that you actually don't participate in, but that you are understanding progressively

how deep the rabbit hole goes, that you really understand the true range of diversity that's out there instead of just narrowing it down to the little pieces and parts that you have there.

[00:48:28] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah, absolutely. There are two things that I was thinking about while you're talking about this that are related. I hadn't actually thought about their relationship before, but one is what we could call anticipatory access. This is something that there's a lot of tension around. I think when we're talking about like universal design, inclusive design because on the one hand it's very common and valid for people, disability, activists, to want spaces, technologies that already anticipated our needs.

So what we want is to be able to go and use something and not to have to ask for access. Or go to an event, and certain things are in place. There's captioning, there's ASL. And at the same time, there's a tension because, nothing about us without us. We don't want other people to assume what our needs are, or to assume that they understand how to meet our needs without asking us first.

And this brings up issues of like, where do we standardize access and where do we maintain a kind of open-ended commitment and curiosity? Is it enough to say every event it has to have CART captioning, or every event has to have ASL as a standard? There's probably other stuff that there needs to be too.

But if nobody's actually asking deaf people or hard of hearing people what they want and need, then we risk creating a standard form of access or just doing the bare minimum again. And not creating situations in which there's like an open dialogue or curiosity about what people's access needs are like, or, I'm somebody who needs fragrance-free spaces and I've had a lot of trouble around people just assuming that they know what that means. And being like, oh, I'm wearing essential oils, so that's fine or whatever. And they actually end up hurting me because they made that assumption because they didn't maintain curiosity. And so there's like an element of access that has to include consent around what counts as access for me. Don't tell me that my access need, or don't assume that for me.

But then the second dimension of this that is important as this piece about designers, becoming researchers or thinking like researchers. When I was writing my book, I spent quite a bit of time

with people who are interested in evidence-based design, which is based on evidence-based medicine.

And I read all of these kind of methodological textbooks for design research. And I was often very dissatisfied with both the methodologies and the way that evidence was being applied, because there are literally websites that you can go to where someone has taken a scientific article, reduced it to a few takeaways and then said, therefore, do these actions in design. And to me, that message misses a lot of the complexity of knowledge that within a research framework, like we would qualify and situate the knowledge, right? We would say, this might not be generalizable, or we found this in this case. But further research is needed. And it produces situations where designers are like, oh, our design is based in research.

Right now I'm doing a project on livable cities and sustainability and stuff. And there's just so many examples where greenwashing happens because someone is, oh, I created this thing. Research shows that natural light boosts productivity. So it's great that we spent all this money on all these big windows for this building or whatever. And it's, okay, yeah, maybe. But that's not actually the point of seeking out greater knowledge about users and their experiences and stuff. And so I think that something that needs to happen is a more like critical approach to research as well. In the form of design training, design education, that sort of thing.

[00:52:29] **Matt May:** Yeah. What do you think is the state of design education, really? Because I get the impression that the ideas of inclusive design, much less accessibility, are just not really taught at at a university level in design fields. It's something that we tend to have to train people in the field to do, even if it is just at a basic level of understanding. And even then it tends to only to be in the accessibility realm about things that a graphic designer is really attuned to: font sizes, colors, et cetera. I think that there needs to be a much greater literacy about what disability means. And I'm wondering is that a place for the design schools to be stepping in and actually doing that teaching? And not just with disability, but with indigeneity, with race, gender, sexuality, age, all of the kinds of diversity that people are designing for. So that they're not just coming out in their twenties, designing for other 20 somethings when there's this whole rest of the world that's being left out of the things that they're working on.

[00:53:39] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah. Yeah, this is a really important question. And I, my sense is that it's different in different design fields.

In architecture, for example, there's been a begrudging, like maybe here's like a token disability class, like here and there at some schools, but some schools have entire programs. So it just depends on where you go.

After the murder of George Floyd and 2020, I noticed, cause I was getting invited to speak more at architecture schools. There's, oh, our curriculum is so white male. Like how do we change this, what do we need to do? And so there's supplementary programming that comes in. People brought in to give talks and do seminars, but less so changes to licensure and that kind of thing.

I don't know about graphic design necessarily. I can't speak to that, but a great person to talk to would be Jen White-Johnson who's a Black, disabled neurodivergent graphic designer, actually teaches graphic design. And does interesting curricular interventions. But I know that where I teach, we don't have a design school, but we have quite a bit invested in design thinking as a kind of corporate discourse has been imported into universities. And so I teach classes that students can take that count towards a design thinking credential. And the training that we got for that was very like, human centered design, like Donald Norman kind of stuff. But I was basically the only person being like, okay, but there are different kinds of humans.

So how are we accounting for any kind of difference in this process and the way that it's laid out. Disability is sometimes treated as a special case. Human difference is not really part of that so much.

[00:55:26] **Matt May:** The design thinking thing has gotten a lot of criticism specifically because, while it doesn't say, so it still recenters the designer as the person that is the agent. And then the user is the recipient of all of this ridiculous skill that they have brought to the situation.

One of the aspects of inclusive design as it is practiced at OCAD is about participatory action research and co-design. Not only are we bringing people into this conversation, but with a great deal of agency as to what direction this work takes. There is a sense of equanimity, that everybody has power in the room that it isn't just a researcher pulling the strings or a designer that is just

making little modifications to a train that's already been built and is rolling down the track. That maybe the train isn't what we need. Maybe it's a bunch of bicycles. Maybe it's a few carts. But that is the key part of this, that it isn't just, paper over it at the end with a diversity study or something to that effect.

I feel like design thinking just brings people back to, I have acquired this information from this community. I will add that to my set of specialties. And it still makes the designers sort of the center of that universe.

[00:56:46] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah. I completely agree with that. And I think that is then reflected in the experiences that disabled people often have in design thinking kinds of contexts, where when people are brought in as user experts or need knowers, like that kind of language and treated as consumers basically, and not as designers.

And this is something that crip technoscience, I think, tries to intervene in. Yeah, I've heard stories from colleagues who are disabled and are like co-teaching the disability design class, and basically treated in that context as just like a user and not as somebody who's actually also a professional designer.

I don't know, there's just, there's so much feminist criticism of this as well. The construction of power in the figure of the designer and how do we unseat that? And certainly co-design, participatory research is one way to do that. A dream that I have that I don't know, one day I will ever fulfill is to create some sort of standalone graduate school for disability and design in as many fields as possible. That would basically train students in disability culture and disability studies. And then they could take that back and go become a licensed architect somewhere else or whatever. But to create like a different institutional structure in which all of those relationships are questioned and unseated. And the way that the curriculum is developed isn't based on historical knowledge structures necessarily, nor is it based on the kind of funding imperatives that tend to define contemporary universities. Under those conditions, maybe it would be possible to teach students in a different way. And I dream of that. I'm always just like trying to figure out how to make that happen. But it's hard to think about how to make that happen within the existing structures that exist for sure.

[00:58:51] **Matt May:** We're going to take a break. We'll be right back with Aimi Hamraie.

On the next episode of InEx:

[00:59:01] **Sadie Red Wing:** You can't talk about colonization of any sort in the United States and Canada without having an Indigenous perspective. So that's been, that's been my badge, so it's really gave me a little bit, not a little bit, a lot of purpose to life. And I know and I'm pretty confident to say that I'll probably be working until, till I'm a hundred years old.

[00:59:19] **Matt May:** A conversation with Sadie Red Wing.

And we're back. And we want to talk about equity now. My framing of this, of the idea of inclusive design is that it's a tool, but the tool needs a purpose, and the purpose is equity. So if inclusive design is the what, then equity is the why.

And I want to ask you either from a personal perspective or from a professional perspective, societal perspective, what does that term, equity, mean to you?

[00:59:49] **Aimi Hamraie:** I guess I always think about there's like this like image or meme that circulates. So it's people are trying to look over a fence and, equality is like, they're standing on the same height box, but the people are different sizes, and equity is like different heights of boxes giving people different stuff that they need to all look over the fence.

I definitely think that's a good baseline societal goal. It's definitely not something I would argue against, I do wonder sometimes like equity is still very much in this like liberal framework that are right of everyone should have equal opportunities to get a job and go to school and that sort of stuff.

And I want that at the same time that I want people to not have to do those things necessarily in order to be part of society and live a good and fulfilling life. And I would want systems that support people's thriving regardless of what they're able to produce which is maybe also a form of equity, just like on a different system scale.

[01:00:58] **Matt May:** I wanted to just tease that piece out because I see that image and it's usually, it's like a baseball game that's over the fence and everybody's looking over it. It's access to a commercial event, but even the way that this is framed is that it is the opportunity to participate in commerce.

And I've seen some other ones. And part of this is just seeing the way that this is couched in different senses, but also that we're still doing it in memes. Just the idea of even expressing what this is like. We only have two frames in Facebook to do it. And that part of it just suggest to me that people really need to take a look at what actually needs to happen. Not only starting from here, moving forward in a way that everybody participates equally, but also addressing the harms of the past that have led us to where we are today.

[01:01:51] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah, totally. I think that this is such a common thing. Like a lot of the universal design imagery is, here's this flexible interface for an ATM or whatever, and it's can we think of an example of something that's not about making or using money? If not, what does that say about how design has been operationalized in our society? Because of course design often produces things, especially in a commercial or like career way that are paid for through enormous amounts of capital or that are assumed to have a market.

If we're trying to do this fuzzy design thinking thing where we're like, everything is designed. We design our classrooms and our syllabi and our friendships and our potlucks, we still need to be thinking about what are we trying to create access to?

I think that some of the best examples that we can look to are actually in disability arts. Disabled artists are really leading the discourse around disability justice. And part of the reason why is that they're not outside of capitalism at all. Like they have to secure funding and stuff, just like everyone else.

But the things that they produce and experiment with in terms of access are for a different purpose, for cultural purpose, that is not so much about buying things. And is often about challenging capitalism or climate change or whatever. Sins Invalid, the disabled performance collective, for example, I just think what they're doing is so interesting and strategic and impactful because they're producing the theory at the same time as they're creating these material forms

that challenge all sorts of things. And at the end of the day, they're producing art. Or, someone like Alice Sheppard. So anyway, yeah. I don't think that anybody would argue against the concept of equity as a goal, but I think that there's a lot more that we can do. Like what about reparations like that?

Like the kind of more fundamental restructuring our society? I think a lot about Ta-Nehisi Coates's essay where he made the case for reparations, before he wrote his book. And just how clearly it demonstrated that yeah, there are all these laws in place to produce equity, Fair Housing Act, et cetera. But because Black people of the U.S. have been denied access to generational wealth, there are these enormous barriers that cannot be corrected until reparations are provided. So it's like calling for the economy itself to be restructured.

In a similar way with disability, how do we even imagine an equitable society for disabled people, when the very concept of disability has always been defined as like the outsider to capitalism? And if we maintain a commitment to capitalism, how can we support and love disabled people? I don't know.

[01:04:55] **Matt May:** Yeah. It's, what's remarkable to me about reparations is as we're recording this the war in Ukraine is going on and the American politicians talking about how Russia is going to owe reparations to Ukraine. And I, I heard that and I was like, good. It's in your vocabulary. Good, good, good. Let's come back to that later.

[01:05:15] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah. But it only applies outside of our borders, actually.

[01:05:18] **Matt May:** American exceptionalism at its most exemplary. Yeah.

So let's talk about your hopes and dreams, for the future. What are the things that you want to see societally happen, in any way that you want to take that?

[01:05:33] **Aimi Hamraie:** So many things. In these COVID times, I want everyone to keep wearing a mask and if it's possible for them and okay for their body, to get vaccinated.

And I want consideration of mutual care and support to be at the forefront of how we make decisions about how we structure things like workplaces and schools and access to resources, access to food and groceries. I want the United States federal government to fully fund PCR testing, which they have stopped doing. I want us to be able to take time off work if we got sick.

These are things that like seem so basic to me, but they are really forms of access that are incredibly fraught, and there are not basic forms of access to in our present moment. I want there to be universal healthcare and I don't want everyone to have to work all the time in order to get access to healthcare, which in the U.S. is the unfortunate reality.

And those are very big things. In a more design sense I would really like to see design schools put a significant amount of resources into recruiting and training disabled students. And those resources have to include mental health support and also accessibility support because it is incredibly violent and alienating for someone to be the only person like them in that kind of environment. And to have to experience generationally compounded forms of privilege that existed within them. And maybe that could change something over time. Certainly lots of disabled designers exist now that wouldn't have existed prior to the ADA. And that in those professions. And I would really like to create that disability design graduate school, and all my friends to come teach at it and create different epistemes and different approaches.

[01:07:34] **Matt May:** That, that sounds fantastic. And I appreciate you bringing out specifically the ideas of health around COVID, and the vaccination as being an equity issue as well. Just because we're talking about people that are immunocompromised don't get to just go out and participate.

There are still people that are at home. And it drives home the fact that there's actually requires people to do things for one another. And that's something that, especially in American culture at this point in time is not something that is taught, that is made exemplary. Everybody is in it for themselves and there's a complete underclass of people that don't get to have that because everyone else is taking it.

[01:08:12] **Aimi Hamraie:** Yeah, absolutely. There are some early moments in the pandemic where a lot of people were doing mutual aid. And I think that a lot of that just fell away or got co-opted.

My community had a mutual aid collective just for grocery delivery for elderly immunocompromised people.

And then Instacart came to Nashville and it just disappeared. We're working against the individualization that capitalism encourages. And that has all of these reverberations, like through kind of disability, community experiences and other things. And at the same time, I am very lucky to be nourished and sustained by the disability communities that I'm part of.

And I want just, happy futures for all of us where we have what we need.

[01:08:59] **Matt May:** Great. One final question. Who would you like to celebrate? Who would you like people to pay attention to that you think is doing good work in the field?

Can I list a couple of people?

Oh, absolutely.

[01:09:14] **Aimi Hamraie:** Okay. Hannah Wong, who is I think now a second year architecture student at the Harvard GSD. She's the first blind student who's ever been a student there before, and created a disabled students group in her first year, while learning remotely and is awesome and is in my lab. And I just think she's so great.

Also Alice Wong, who. Is behind the Disability Visibility Project and one of our most important cultural producers, and really an archivist of disability voices and perspectives, and just does so much for our community. Jen White-Johnson, who I mentioned earlier, who's just such an amazing graphic designer and has so many great projects that come from the place of, if you can change the iconography of something, you can actually change the world. And she's doing amazing work. I'm holding up a zine that she made with her son Knox who's autistic called Autistic Joy, where she is basically creating a world for Knox, where he can understand that he is valuable and that there's nothing wrong with him. Which is very different than many autistic kids.

Those three people, I would say, I feel like everyone should get to know their work immediately.

[01:10:36] **Matt May:** Aimi Hamraie, I want to thank you. I learned so much, this has been a fabulous and yeah I hope a lot of people come in and get the chance to listen to what you have to say.

[01:10:47] **Aimi Hamraie:** Thank you so much for doing this, Matt. I really enjoyed talking to you.

[01:10:50] **Matt May:** That's our show. Show notes and transcripts for all InEx episodes are available at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. All episodes are released under Creative Commons Attribution, 4.0 International license. Thanks for listening.

[00:00:00] **Matt May:** This is InEx, a show about inclusive design. I'm your host, Matt May. In this episode:

[00:00:09] **Sadie Red Wing:** You can't talk about colonization of any sort in the United States and Canada without having an Indigenous perspective. So that's been, that's been my badge, so it's really gave me a little bit, not a little bit, a lot of purpose to life. And I know and I'm pretty confident to say that I'll probably be working until, till I'm a hundred years old.

[00:00:28] **Matt May:** A conversation with Sadie Red Wing.

All right. I am honored to to welcome Sadie Red Wing to this podcast series. And first I want to start with the land acknowledgment: OCAD university acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Huron-Wendat, and I am presently on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Duwamish and Coast Salish Peoples, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we stand and create. And Sadie, would you like to start with an introduction?

[00:01:04] **Sadie Red Wing:** So hello everybody. My name is Sadie Red Wing. I am currently assistant professor here at OCAD U in Toronto, Canada. I am a citizen of the Spirit Lake Dakota nation out of Fort Totten, North Dakota. And I also am half Cheyenne River Lakota. So a lot of Lakota, Dakotas, Nakota, South Dakota, North Dakota.

There's a lot of them in there, but just to know that at within talking about my work and where I come from, you'll hear me mention more of Great Plains perspective within the Teton wall of the Midwest territories within North and South Dakota. Yeah, I'm super happy to start this off.

[00:01:43] **Matt May:** Great. And I actually, I saw you and reached out to you because I had been in a conference in 2019 called Design+Diversity, and saw you give this amazing presentation. It's on YouTube. I'll put it in the show notes for this, about indigeneity and design. And so then I reach out to you and say, I'd really love to have you on this podcast, and I'm at this university in

Toronto. And you come back and you're like, yeah, I'm actually an assistant professor there now. I'm like, oh no!

[00:02:12] **Sadie Red Wing:** I know! We could have been having a cup of coffee right now, but...

[00:02:15] **Matt May:** Right, I'm actually going to attend precisely one class in person next month. So I'm excited about that for the finale.

So could you talk a little bit about sort of your background and your relationship to design as you came up and evolved?

[00:02:32] **Sadie Red Wing:** Yeah, absolutely. Like I said, I'm originally from the Midwest, definitely a Midwest gal. So I'll North Dakota, South Dakota. Not a lot of design influence in the area.

Just, it means jobs, just examples of what great design that could be visual design system design or whatever it may be. So I grew up in a real rural area, very influenced by pop culture, born of the nineties. So it definitely had a strong influence of creativity based on what you see on TV and music.

I didn't come from any encouragement to be an artist and I didn't really know what a graphic designer was. I just knew what I liked being attracted with the mainstream pop culture, media. So I think how I started in my journey was more of the fact that in growing up and being an adult, I knew that I wanted to go to a tribal college and it was not so much that I had an area of interest.

I didn't know what degree to go in. I just want to go to a tribal college and as you're going through that process and you figure out what you excel in, what you don't excel in. Looking at like just transcripts or just, classes that I enjoyed. I just really advanced in the art aspect.

And part of that was just my interests. In my friends groups, there was just a lot of creative minds, particularly working within peers that want to be musicians doing community events, working within mural design or graffiti, or just how to adorn your laptop and skateboards with stickers and whatnot.

So it just being in that presence or having like tangible pieces that make a community feel unique or give us a little bit identity. We didn't really have that. If I were to want to be in a position to make t-shirts or, make stickers or just stuff that I thought was cool, how would you even do it?

And I came across a brochure with the Institute of American Indian Arts. And they were the only tribal college that had a new media arts program. And I thought that was it. My journey really starts when I step foot on the Institute of American Indian Arts campus. So leaving the Midwest, going to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

And I didn't know. And even today, like I didn't realize that my experience at tribal college would be something that I would have to bring with me into some of these spaces, particularly when we're talking about targeting more Indigenous demographics, how do we keep student retention, particularly to Native American students?

So this was really like influential on my experience going through IAIA. And one of the reasons why IAIA worked, not necessarily a design focus, but it worked in having resources to keep an underrepresented student retained. And part of that was being in a classroom space where other of your classmates share the same ideologies as you, the professor looks like you. We're going to a library that has predominantly Indigenous authors in it, which is a small library, but it's still a one locally on campus, we'll go to the cafeteria and get food with tribal influences.

And I feel like a tribal college did a really good job at demonstrating what an ideal utopia of the institution or university would work as for a student. I didn't realize it then I didn't appreciate and respect it then. But now that I look back and share like my journey, I do really pinpoint specific elements of my experience all four years.

Left there 2013 and got an internship at NASA within Cape Canaveral, Florida.

So left New Mexico, went to Florida. And really that was probably my first time being in a position where I'm leaving a community I'm so comfortable in. It's like family to me. Like I'm just in my own little universe with creatives, getting a chance to see modern art, traditional art, understanding how to talk about repatriation, how to talk about regeneration or reclaiming,

getting to know laws about art and Indian craft, or just like policies around art and Indian craft within the United States, like all these policies.

And how do you protocol objects and how you talk about visual sovereignty. And it's like, fight against the government, but maybe fight against museums on getting some belongings that were stole from us. And that could be anything between household items from like the 1300s or even human remains.

You don't learn that at a mainstream or a westernized institution that doesn't have a large demographic focus, but it means to be a Native American professional, working within art, design or craft, you gotta know these things and no one's teaching them.

So again, very fortunate to go to IAIA, and then when I went to NASA, that comfort rug was just ripped underneath from me because now it's our first time being vulnerable, immersed in a professional space at NASA. And now it's weird because I don't see anybody that looks like me.

I got people who probably never even heard of what the Lakota or Dakota nationality is. 2013 was a totally different time around what inclusivity feels like in a workspace. When I contrast my experience with NASA, I was just really uncomfortable and I just knew that I just didn't want to be there. It just, wasn't my cup of tea, just wasn't my peer group. And I just didn't feel like it could thrive in that space. And then it came up to what's the next step or what's well, where to next.

And I had a couple of options. One, I could go join the military, or I could go get a master's. And I decided to go get a master's. Ended up at North Carolina State University and, kind of the same thing. I'm going into a space where there's no cultural competency or not learning about terminology that is relevant to maybe my area of study. But one of the reasons why I wanted to go there is how do you even research? How do you become an educator? How do you teach graphic design?

And I think some of the challenges for myself was if I'm bringing a whole library or a whole vocabulary with me, that people don't experience in their daily lives, then it's hard to get responses. So it's hard to get feedback. It's hard to have really solid critiques, particularly if if I'm the first Native American that someone has met sitting in that classroom.

If I had mentors who had never had a Native American student before, this is really challenging in means of just acquiring resources or just even trying to paint the picture of what my goals are wanting to be an educator. So it was tough, but it worked, I made it. In 2016, I graduated North Carolina State and I left there with a thesis, "Learning the Lakota visual language through shape play." That was really challenging pre 2016. Cause you got to remember a lot of stuff hasn't happened yet. Meaning that the dropping of racist mascots hasn't happened, George Floyd incident didn't happen. A pandemic didn't happen. So there was like a little stint in the last three years from now that we just were very progressive, and that could have been within our politics and many things that were going on. So pre 2016, we still had racist mascots. There's still strong conversations around stereotypes are harmful. And I felt like I brought in a lot of kind of issues in some way.

There's two main things that are relevant within my journey and my goals and that kind of led me into this space was as a student and as an inspiring educator, when I come into the space, I might be the only one in the room that has an obligation.

That's not an obligation. It's an honor to go teach at a predominantly Native American community, First Nations Indigenous community. When I sit in a classroom, like I say, at North Carolina State, no one in that room has that same obligation. Just a means of, how do you teach and how do you target this type of material to the audience as sensitive? I think that wasn't a goal. And if it was, it wasn't as vocal as it could have been.

The second thing was, if I'm working with a demographic or working with students who might be a little more vulnerable side, we're just at the very beginning of that generation wanting to learn language and really getting immersed in like more of a cultural context. Cause now they're the ones that are hearing diversity, inclusion, equity. And I feel like just there isn't a blueprint of what that looks like working with Native American students. It's so interesting. So interesting that's still the case now. So I had a lot of frustrations leaving there.

Just a means of look like everything that we're learning at a graduate level in pertaining to research and graphic design, it's all future trends and it's all well, meaning that again, times are changing a little bit, but just a means of us being experts in spaces.

Being within it, the design research, there was really a strive in the future trends route. So meaning that we're learning about how to be graphic designers, working with augmented reality, working within virtual reality spaces, thinking about artificial intelligence.

I feel like I could take all this information and bring it back to a rural space and it wouldn't be needed because in a lot of the areas, a lot of demographics of the students that our target with were poor. We're rural. Like we have horrible cell phone service, internet service. We don't have the infrastructure for beautiful computer labs or just even software, or how can we get laptops or just even sometimes phones in some of these kids' hands.

So it means having to advocate just resources. How do you even bring in this concept of introducing software, but then also wanting to maintain a culture that has been on the verge of extinction. And there's just all these complexities and so many layers, which we'll get into when we talk about this concept around decolonization, but just to really be in a situation it's man, like I'm going to be an educator. I got to go back home. None of my students are going to have uses for Oculus goggles or like little, like augmented reality, like things because we're just not ready yet. We're not there yet. And no one is thinking about us within that space and if they are they're not doing much in that and advancement routes.

I kind of left North Carolina State with a little bit of frustration. I just wanted that peace. I wanted to walk across the stage, get my piece of paper and be prepared to go back and to teach, whether it be at a tribal college, within a reservation space, at a place as a larger Indigenous population.

And I felt like when I left there I, the angst that I felt was why was it so hard for me to just develop a thesis when I was hard to communicate what my areas of interests are when I'm trying to funnel all these design issues specific to Indigenous communities into one project. And I felt like I'm happy and fortunate that I left there with what I did, but then also too, I felt like following North Carolina State, more and more cans of worms are starting to open.

Once we started to be a little bit more vocal on why that sucks for a student like me, but then also if we're, if you're taking a class and graphic design history and we're learning all these elements of varying forms of communication, styles of communication, semiotics and whatnot. What was getting frustrating in a lot of those spaces was you could read a graphic design history book and

you can talk about just how strong Roman influence within our type. We could talk about ancient forms of writing systems that can be categorized within a realm of semiotics and everything that was written.

And within those time periods that you get in your graphic design textbook, there's little to none exposure to design forms of communication artists, even to just design thinking and systems of North America that originate in our Indigenous to North America. If you are to find those, they're usually in anthropology books. I hate this word, primitive. I hate being categorized in there, but primitive art, art history, American art history. It's always in the past. It's never relevant now, and it's never in the conversation of graphic design. It's always in the conversation in museums and stuff. So when I started to be more vocal and, yo like everything that you talk about within design curriculum, you share and demonstrate in all these design communities.

So getting so during this time to get more introduced into spaces like AIGA, but there's nothing pertained to United States, Canada, or even, I just feel bad for tribes in Mexico that are not even federally recognized, that's a whole continent, like where it's a huge gap missing. So when I started to be a little bit more vocal or express those feelings in more design communities, it really led me to thinking like, wow do we really live in a continent that has low, low to none competency of Native American, First Nations Indigenous culture.

What makes my job so hard compared to anybody else, is that the hardest part of my job as a Native American graphic designer as Native American educator, the hardest part of any Native American educator's job, is that the dominant population North America cannot picture what a functioning continent looks like. Predominantly Indigenous. There's no incorporation of systematic thinking, particularly when it comes to how we traveled within our trade routes, how tribes from the Antarctic would navigate all the way down in South America, down into Argentina and Chile. There's none of that. And then just even like our food preservations How, if there are so many tribes, we all spoke different languages.

How do we interact? How can we communicate? If North America could envision that and know what that looks like and make my job a thousand times easier, but as a design educator, now it's my job to paint the picture of what that looks like. And it's been a really interesting journey.

It's been a little bit of frustrating one. But just in means of, I understand the importance of why podcasts like this, why people are doing similar projects because when we get into conversations around DEI, decolonization and you want to have those conversations in North America, we're not talking about this in Africa. We're not talking about this in Australia or Asia. We're making resources here in the United States or Canada. And you can't talk about colonization of any sort in the United States and Canada without having an Indigenous perspective. So that's been that's been my badge, so it's really gave me a little bit, not a little bit, a lot of purpose to life.

And I know and I'm pretty confident to say that I'll probably be working until, till I'm a hundred years old. So it's nice. It's a fruitful job. It's hard sometimes, but it has led me into many things.

Participating in the protest at Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline. I feel like in design communities, where we like to be the first ones to jump on buzzwords, and we'd like to be the first ones to jump on specific events. I'm fortunate that yes, my time at Standing Rock has led me into conversations with the design communities specifically when it comes to activism, advocacy or being an advocate. Which allowed me to be brought into spaces.

I think AIGA was a really good help, particularly around chapters of inviting speakers. So I formulated this presentation called Fuck the Stereotype and within Fuck the Stereotype, which is that Diversity Plus Design presentation. Hopefully I give some type of awareness of why it's so hard to find Native American designers. Why is it so hard to find us on Google search results? If you're somebody who is not familiar with that particular culture, and you're designing something for Indigenous Peoples Day, Native American Heritage Month, or an event on campus, and all you go to is Google for inspiration or Behance or a 99 Designs or whatever it may be.

And if all you're seeing is the stuff that we don't want you to represent us with, what do you do? So what are the first steps? So that's where Fuck the Stereotype came into play. And again, that was created before the dropping the Washington R word logo. And it was a beautiful time because that presentation allowed me to travel all over the globe, to be honest. So then to know that you caught it, that that was probably like my first lecture to the world. Like the tip of the iceberg to introduce what this type of work is for myself.

And essentially that's led me into teaching positions. It's led me into more working with more Native American organizational groups, like the American Indian College Fund in Denver, Colorado. And then knowing that more and more institutions, businesses firms, organizations, are pushing for more inclusivity, particularly in our handbooks and our missions are pushing for more decolonization and just ways to be sustainable.

And in all those key words fit into a cultivated Native American culture. So I've been doing my best to bridge those gaps or just really see okay our knowledge is needed in some of these spaces, not all. And then really trying to demonstrate what it looks like.

So coming to OCAD and knowing that OCAD U has a strong initiative of decolonization sustainability in their handbook. don't see it a lot in North America. So that's what kinda led me here is if this institution is looking to demonstrate what that looks like, and if they're putting indigeneity, Indigenous perspective first, I want to experience it. I wanna feel it. I want to know how you build something like that because there's not a lot of building going down in the United States. So, Toronto!

[00:19:58] **Matt May:** So this is funny. We're two Americans that are connected to this university that's in Toronto and one of my classes was with Alexandra Nahwegahbow, Indigenous art culture and communications. Talking about this from a gallery perspective and about representation.

And there's so many threads that I want to tug at about this, but as an American, the discussion of like tribal colleges and universities, TCUs, right? I think there's the stereotype of Indigenous art or design being tethered to Indigenous tooling, that it's about only the sort of traditional artwork of rug making and dream catchers and things like that. Like that's the kind of stereotype about this. And a lot of the discussion that goes on in this is this recontextualization, right?

Like that if you haven't really engaged in Indigenous communities in North America, for example, there's this kind of Route 66, 1950s stereotype, like, it's a commodity to be sold and resold and out of course continues to this day. But then, there's *been* a *dialogue*, right?

There are things about, Western culture that have been infused either consensually or not into Indigenous peoples. And that among, that includes technology, right? Like the advent of cell

phones, trucks. There are things that are part of the everyday life of Indigenous peoples in North America that almost lend themselves to there being that sort of merging of Indigenous traditional, artistic ethics and the technology of today and you had one project like that. So I want talk about that, and I want to talk about you had talked a little bit about that TCU environment being a safe space for that work.

But then how do you take that safe space instead of, just you being the one ambassador to NC State for that, and make it something where it's embedded in design culture more broadly?

[00:21:55] **Sadie Red Wing:** Yeah. It's really interesting because I feel like in the United States, people still haven't heard of a tribal college and granted there's only like 37 of them. There's not a lot, but just then think about like historical black colleges. I just feel we are really, we just lived in this world where if you're not talking about like Ivy Leagues then nothing else matters. It may not necessarily be the notion now, but think about like late eighties, early nineties or whatever, just even think about stress as students, you need to get in somewhere and thinking about.

And again, that's just speaking from personal experience of this being my mom's first gen. So I'd be second gen going to college. And I don't think anyone prepped us. It was kinda more like you, you need to get grades, but it wasn't so much more about our wellness or being, it was just kinda more of a following okay, you have a better shot at a better job once you go to a more pristine college, maybe join a frat that might help you, or a sorority, get an internship in there. Doing the check marks that an average American student would do.

When I went to Institute of American Indian Arts. My dad had many cousins who all went to the same tribal college and I always thought that was just awesome. I was like, I never in elementary, middle school, high school college, even to this day, even to this day, I never sat in a classroom with a relative or like a brother or sister or cousin or a neighbor or something.

A tribal college, the classroom's predominantly Indigenous. And you're in a small, more rural community. You probably sit in a classroom, a cousins or our friends, or maybe your neighbors . So I think I was always jealous that I didn't have that space.

I went to high school in Des Moines, Iowa, and being the only native there just made me strive to just be immersed. And I just just it didn't even have to be someone in the same tribe as me. I just want to be like in a space there, so see Si Tanka College within Huron, South Dakota, that shut down. And that was going to be it like, I was like, oh yeah, once I graduate, I'm going to Si Tanka. Translates to "big foot college" in South Dakota.

And I wanted to go there because my aunties were there. Cousins were there. And it didn't pull through. So then I went to IAIA, again, I'm going in there a little bit ignorant and not thinking about what I'm about to be exposed to, but once I went there and that was it, and this is my first time. Again, mind you, little nineties, South Dakota country. All I know is my tribe. I don't get to see any other tribes, the surrounding tribes within a visiting state. So think about Montana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Wyoming. Like all those tribes are really similar to mine because we're when the plains, like we're in the prairie.

So anything that within our culture, everything in all our tribal culture within the Midwest goes straight to the prairie. So if I'm going to New Mexico, now I'm going to a desert, the Southwest. Now I'm seeing tribes I'd never seen before. One thing that I really respect in that Santa Fe space is that those Pueblo nations, if anybody gets a chance to go to New Mexico and get to see a Pueblo, those Pueblos are so strong. Like just a beautiful, humble people, but they're warriors. Meaning that they're one of the few tribes that hasn't moved. It's just really interesting, if you get a chance to be immersed with an a Pueblo nation in New Mexico.

And man, like these are the ones that bought the conquistadores and like the Pueblo revolt, like they could have been man, if they started in Pueblo and those conquistadores pushed them up north towards us or push them somewhere it'd be a whole, we live in a whole different world, but when you see what's there, there's a strong hub in that Southwest, that Chaco Canyon and so many different fruits and vegetables that come out of there.

So once I got to see and respect what sovereignty looks like. Those Pueblo nations were the first ones that really introduced me. And to see how they documented their histories and their trade routes. You can see it on their Pueblo pottery designs. So when you, so was fortunate, is that when

you've taken a class at IAIA and you're learning, not necessarily anthropologists or archeologists or a museum experts.

The description or definitions of like particular craft items, quotation mark "craft items." Now I'm actually hearing it from the actual tribe. And now they're saying like, oh, like you see these parrot motifs, like the bird, parrots aren't in the Southwest, but that's a story carried on that those tribes will go down south into Mexico and into South America and they trade feathers.

If you look at a beautiful pottery or like a ceramic pottery piece, and you can see, these tropes, these motifs of foods and animals that are not Indigenous within the United States area. That's evidence that there's trade and travel.

So once you get a chance to see that history with authenticity and accuracy, then it makes you think man, so my tribe must do that. Or I, what, how does my tribe do the same thing? Cause we did the same thing too, even if we follow the buffalo and we're taking care of the prairie and not necessarily the desert like there. So there's many, there's a lot of connections in there.

Another thing that that was so beautiful within the TCU space was I got to see how work informs a documentation and writing and visual languages from thousands of years before contact, before Christopher Columbus was like a twinkle in anybody's eye, how those forms can be brought into a space where now it's like you get internet and tech and stuff.

Now we're seeing just beautiful, Pueblo-inspired graffiti or just, you see it a lot in like fashion now. Just to see what those concepts look how do they survive in a contemporary space? Then usually it's the designer who designs it, who invents it and stuff like that.

So in means of being in immersed within Indigenous tribes, the United States in one place like, man, within my time at IAIA I was probably introduced like 300 tribes I never even heard of before. And it's insane. And if I never even heard of those before then I know an average American citizen hasn't heard of them before either.

So once you get familiar and even too, like, it's just more oh, a classmate of mine, I may not sit with them in the lunchroom and I may not talk with them, or even be friends on social media

with them. But when they get up in front of the classroom and show their artwork or show critique and explain it, like they're educating me too.

And again, that's a universal, but particularly I'm getting educated on a particular tribal visual language. And I felt, and I feel like a lot of people aren't fortunate in that sense. They can't sit in a classroom and get a chance to see if I have a classmate of a different try in my classroom than I could to see different types of art styles, different types of ways of thinking.

That's something that's beautiful and it's not highlighted. So when I chose, so those feelings, I really do my best to bring into into a space. Before I started at OCAD, working with the American Indian College Fund and I had a greater understanding of what inclusivity looks like. And I feel like TCUs, or particularly organizations that work in higher education. They demonstrate frameworks that fit to terminology that we use in DEI. The only thing is that they just do. Meaning that they've been doing it before any design community mentioned about diversity, inclusion, equity.

So I feel like anytime we're having a conversation like this, I always root back to how a tribal college works and how higher education organizations work. What people forget is that when you categorize Indigenous peoples into one pan- Indian, like race, then you're forgetting now how hard it is to work in a space, particularly with a tribal group, so you may have been to war with in the past, or you might be enemies with so in a space. So let's say if I'm sitting in a classroom and there's 15 of us, and there's five of the 15 who might come from a tribe that is enemies of mine like we're not going to be disruptive and wild and have that be a confrontation.

At the end of the day, we're here to do a goal. So I feel like when I use those experience, I bring a lot of those experiences into conversation around inclusivity. Our goal is to make sure that our students thrive, and they thrive through based on resources that could be through funding. It could be through technology tools. It could be better programming. So there's more of a community feel in these spaces. So if those are the goals, anytime we enter into a meeting space, all of our issues are left at the door because the main thing is thinking about our youth.

So if you hear a conversation, it's a conversation about seven generations ahead. That's a shared structure that we have. So when we come into a space, I feel like people forget that Indigenous

tribes, North America is big. I feel like people forget that sometimes. So that tribes, so a lot of us have different skin colors, depending on where you're at in North America.

We're going to have a lot of tribes that have different skin colors, we wear different adornments. We have different features. We have different languages. We have different foods, we have different everything. There's so much diversity in those tribal nations and there is confrontation amongst tribes due to historical contents.

And all of those issues are left at the door because at the end of the day, when we're sitting around the table the goal is that student. And I feel like. Why can that not? Why are those motives not shared elsewhere is happening at tribal college when there's so much diversity, think about it. There's 600 federally recognized tribes in the United States 600 different nationalities. And I feel like, why are we having conversations around not being inclusive? When, if it's being demonstrated that 500 different types of nationalities can work together?

Like we're the ones that are demonstrating it, but we're just so underneath the rug that people don't think about us, think about reaching out to maybe Indigenous professional organizations to help train what inclusivity and diversity looks like in the space. So that's another reason why, like the student advocacy portion bridges some of those aspects, because everything that we're talking about in the design community, tribes have been doing it and they've been doing it.

Hopefully, people today won't have to feel what extinction is going to feel like, to the point where it's like, all right, let's put our differences aside. Let's just get the shit done and then move on to the next thing. But I just feel like it's just, I don't know. Sometimes I just feel like we're going in circles and if we're designers or inventors, like how come we haven't invented something a little bit better yet?

[00:32:43] **Matt May:** As you're talking about this, I'm thinking about this kind of trope about like Indigenous people in America which is they're part of our heritage. But this is the opposite of inclusivity, right? It's co-option.

It's like in the curio cabinet of Americana, is this image of, head dresses, and that they're all mashed together. And I think in your talk, you mentioned the California Republic image with

New Mexican imagery instead of imagery from California tribes and things. Similar to in accessibility where you just kind of paper over the actual fundamental holes in access that you just have this patina, this veneer of indigeneity that sort of makes it that makes it look like everything is all good. And the effect of that is that it lets you not think about it.

And I was thinking about this just to connect this to decolonization. In Communication Arts you wrote this:

"This is the time for conversation about decolonization and respect in graphic design. We tribal designers are just now learning how to address issues that are culturally sensitive for us, like cultural appropriation as it is still fresh to our nature to do our main focus is making sure Indigenous audiences are represented accurately, appropriately and respectfully as we sustain an identity in the world."

That part just really grabs me. A little story, because it connects to another thing that you said here.

When I was in high school, I I spent part of high school on the Navajo Nation in Tuba City, Arizona, and inside, like entirely encircled in the Navajo Nation is the Hopi Nation. And so there were Hopis that were going to Tuba City High School and... there was just this tension. And here I am, like, I come from Massachusetts. Like I knew nothing about anything west of the Mississippi, much less like Indigenous culture, and I'm like completely out of my element, not understanding what the tension is in this. And it just underscores how little we ever really engage in this stuff at all. And so it's like, how do you do that as like a white person in North American culture without observation bias, without actually putting your finger on the scales.

Because if you look at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, that they've, they're heavily interventionist historically, to the point of genocide to the populations of North America. How can you actually connect without that paternalistic, reaching in? "Let me help you, let me do this thing for you."

[00:35:04] **Sadie Red Wing:** I'm grinning over here because I'm just kinda imagine just a Massachusetts boy going to Tuba City. But I wanna I want to come back to Massachusetts. In thinking about what indigeneity looks like in graphic design, I mentioned that because people

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can't envision what the content looks like predominantly Indigenous, that makes my job a little bit more difficult.

But now what I'm noticing within the last five years or so is that it seemed like, and I don't know why I have no idea why this is and I'm biased and you'll see you understand why, but I get it, but I just, I get frustrated sometimes is that when people want to design.

So thinking about people that are in good nature, people in thinking about we want to help, we want to celebrate these holidays. We want to be respectful. You want to be inclusive. We don't want to pull a Coachella, appropriate anything, but it's always a non-Indigenous graphic designer's choice to look for a pattern or to look for a symbol or just a means of if it, if they're trying to find a font, the font, why is always the fonts that always have a lot of symbols in them a lot of triangles. So it's just yo, like why is a pattern or something of an assortment of shapes that can be in a geometric form or whatever it may be. Why is that the go-to when designing for Native American tribes? Why is your go-to automatically, you gotta use symbols? And then even too, you want to develop a fairly vague some type of shape form formulation that looks tribally. It's just a waste of time to be honest.

So in that Communication Arts article, that was meaning that I wouldn't like, there'd be like, why would I be writing in Hebrew if I can't read it? If you're trying to mimic a form of writing or a form of documenting our archiving through, symbols versus like Roman characters, why make fun of it?

So I think sometimes the word exploitation, I think some people may not know when they're exploiting and they could be having great judgment, but they just don't have an example to compare what exploitation is. So in those situations, I say, yo like Native Americans and First Nations, like we should be the easiest to design for.

And one of the reasons why we should be the easiest designed for, because we read lands! So this is when we get into talking about decolonization. When we talk about visual sovereignty. To give a little bit example. So going back to the south. If anyone's ever been in the Phoenix area, Tucson area, they have those mountains. The silhouette of those mountain ranges or the peaks, those tribes can read them, meaning that within the peak. So if you think of the peak or the pointiness

or the shape of a peak, I know in Phoenix, there's like a peak and a mountain that almost looks like a shark fin, but all those peaks in those mountain ranges, they hold stories.

They might hold like creation stories or folktales or whatnot. So I always say,

[00:38:00] **Matt May:** Yeah, like the seal of the Navajo Nation has four peaks, like in the north south east and west. And they're their boundaries. This is where we've lived. And, it's enshrined right there in the imagery.

[00:38:10] **Sadie Red Wing:** Yeah. So I like using Arizona as a good example of a place that speaks, that shows visual sovereignty. If you look at something like the Phoenix Suns, or even to think about Phoenix, very large urban Native American population, they're always doing like Native American family night at sporting events and stuff like that.

People gotta make flyers. Of course, we still see some of the corny symbolism and stuff on there, but just in means of if we're targeting that fan base that might go to a Phoenix Suns game in that fan base is familiar with those mountain histories. Throw some mountains in there, maybe, we're creating, we're artists like make those mountains look a little bit more cooler or just even to the sunset colors in Arizona, there's just a beautiful types of purples and oranges and yellows. That's a color palette that reads to those. Different types of cacti species, different elements like prickly pear, you pull up a prickly pear, like there's so much design on there.

Instead of going to using triangle square circles, assemble them in a way that could be mocking, that could be exploiting. I'd be creative and use land, bring back some of those flowers. Flowers in the desert are different than flowers in the prairie. And I feel like when we're talking about those land motifs it brings us into conversations around colonization. But in contrast with Seattle, so they have the Mariners or the Seahawks, and that Seahawks is in that form of line writing. But that if you look at the Seahawks logo versus like the Phoenix Suns, of course, this is just me coming from my perspective, like the blues and the green speak to that foresty Northwest, like that ocean, you have the Pacific Ocean with some of those evergreens or Pines or Cedar trees.

And then the Indigenous people from the region, they can read that, they know that. The form, those coastal lines, they're not like geometric patterns. They're more like a little bit more organic,

almost like brush-like strokes. And some of that could be reflective because you guys have the ocean over there to see some of that organic flowing. So just even like little, just like little natural elements, I think people forget.

Okay, so if you want to target that audience, you got to know the land. And then we get into talking about land acknowledgment. In this conversation on decolonization, I'm pretty upfront to say that it annoys me to see the conversation on decolonization being shared and creating resources that are not useful for those who have been colonized in the United States or Canada. What's the use of having this conversation when you don't have an Indigenous person present to give evidence of how colonization is a problem?

So if you don't have us to acknowledge what the problem is, how can you solve the problem if you don't know what the problem is? So I come into this conversation more of actually defining this as colonization is very disruptive to land. And I can see this in many levels. And I feel like because it's not mapped out and it's not charted based on the layers and levels, I feel like it's going over people's heads or people are confusing it with decolonialism or people are just using the word decolonization as a safe word for not saying diversity or inclusion, but essentially how this plays and this will thread into talking about inclusivity too.

[00:41:32] **Matt May:** Let's take a break here and then we can come back and sort of get into what you're talking about here and just segue into inclusivity. We'll be right back with Sadie Red Wing.

InEx is a major research project by me, Matt May, as part of the master of design degree program at OCAD University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Episodes and transcripts of this podcast can be found at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. Follow InEx on Twitter at @inexpodcast.

And we're back with Sadie Red Wing. And now it's the sports segment! We started talking about about sports imagery and icons. And I was thinking about some of the teams here and there's a trajectory from the caricature of Indigenous imagery to some attempt to be inclusive and I can catalog this. So there's the Washington football team, which is now known as the Commanders, dragged kicking and screaming away from using racist imagery.

I just recently saw for the first time in a box score, the name Guardians. So the Cleveland Guardians begin play this year. And so this is an example of just the community rallying around changing the terminology that's offensive. And then there, there's still more to go and there are lots of names like Braves, Chiefs, Seminoles. Some of these teams have found, and actually Washington did this as well, people who aligned themselves, that had an Indigenous identity and said that they represent us. And it seems like an after the fact thing, right? It's like being caught out about something and then saying but no, look, and I think that as teams have evolved there's been more of an effort really to, if you're going to be using Indigenous imagery, that you think about the way that you do it.

And the things like the Arizona Coyotes, I mentioned, the Vancouver Canucks use Coast Salish imagery in one of their logos, and then Seattle's new NHL team. So we were starting from scratch. There was an older team known as the Seattle Totems, and it had been re-proposed as the name for the team, which ended up being the Seattle Kraken.

And that it got shut down, like right away. Nope, not doing that. That's recalling this racist imagery of... Seattle had a totem pole that had actually been stolen off of tribal land that sat in Pioneer Square until not too long ago. And so they worked with Indigenous peoples in the area to develop a land acknowledgment that's read at the beginning of every game, a video that's played at the beginning of every game. They've done one-off jerseys that were designed by Indigenous creators. That there's a sense of, and this is the difference and where we make the segue into inclusive design.

There are people in the room, to go back to what you were talking about in the first segment. There are people that have a stake in the work that's going on. And I guess I want to start with that. How does somebody who is just beginning to acknowledge that they're leaning on tropes, not just about indigeneity, any area of race, gender, ability, sexuality, how do you dig yourself out of that hole in good faith?

[00:44:37] **Sadie Red Wing:** Oh, so first I want to say, I think there needs to be a podcast similar to this, just on sports.

[00:44:46] **Matt May:** I kind of want to do that, now. I might call you later for that.

[00:44:49] **Sadie Red Wing:** Because, okay. So being Native American and being a graphic designer, and when your last name is Red Wing, like the Detroit Red Wings, I cannot get away from any conversation, which is fine.

I love sports and I understand where some of the argument comes from around honoring, but then also too, like there's areas of research that can be done just a little bit better, but I do want to give a shout out to Seattle. My grandma's brother moved to Seattle during the Relocation Act in the 1960s, started a family over there and just loved it. I love going to Seattle. And I don't know, I don't know if you lived in Seattle during the time, but there was a school shooting I want to say in like 2014. And one of my cousins passed away from that shooting and the Seattle Seahawks, did a beautiful honoring for the Marysville shooting.

My family is I want to say Maryville's, north of Seattle and within the tribe. I have cousins enrolled into Tulalip tribe and Tulalip has a lot of partnering with the Seahawks or within their casinos. So in means of seeing that progression, because Seattle does a really good job say, I don't think Seattle gets enough credit on how well they work within their Native American communities and how much they essentially, they probably could do a little bit better...

[00:46:01] **Matt May:** There's a lot of a hole to dig out there too. So yeah.

[00:46:04] **Sadie Red Wing:** What is nice is there's that strong coastal. You have the, the strong like kind of the wood, the very wood dense area brings a lot out of, I guess like maybe like a style, I guess like music, like Seattle has a strong style of music. They have a strong style and distinction within Indigenous visual languages.

And I feel like that's a little bit more prominent, let's say within the Southeast, around the Carolinas we don't see them much as a prominent style within like Virginia's, or just kinda below New England. So I give them a lot of credit and I give them a lot of credit of having a nation to nation relationship, whether that's the sports complex having a relationship with their casinos, but there is some type of nation to nation.

We'll get back to that when we talk about inclusivity, but sports. I feel like in talking about something similar to the Seattle Seahawks, there's like some slight design flow goes in there that

gives some type of evidence of some type of honoring now. Contrast the Seattle, the Seahawk style of a mascot compared to, and just for this sake, and again I'm going to say "Redskin" for this sake.

So I apologize ahead of time, but I feel like the way that Washington was defending to keep using the word "Redskin." It was, it just wasn't, it was so inappropriate. So I'm gonna say it like this, if, and again, coming from talking about graphic design, not necessarily the whole aura of those who are very loyal to the DC team, but just speaking in a graphic design standpoint, if DC really wanted to honor tribal communities, like wouldn't they want to *buy*, like a logo from a Native American graphic designer? Like you would think that'd be like one thing, the second thing, and me and my brother, just having a conversation about this is the profile of the man as, the Redskins logo.

It's so crazy being 2020 and saying that, I apologize for the slur again, but the profile... it's a hand drawing is a drawing like it's like we may, okay. So if this is, if they didn't go to be the Commanders yeah, 2020. 2020. We had Adobe. Like there's 3D modeling software on there.

Like you could have gave some slight improvement. Like you could have we have all this technology and software, like you could have got that hand drawing of the exaggerated features like homeboys still looking like from the 1800s, give us a good image to honor if you're actually like honoring, the folks, we can't get out of that trope.

You would think that like someone would gave that a gentleman, a makeover on their helmets or something, or at least there's you watch like football now or or just, any type of form of sports entertainment they have those graphics or animations. Maybe DC did have some great animations and maybe they gave them a, I don't even know the name of the mascot, but maybe I just didn't see it, because I didn't really care for it.

But long story short come on, like we have all this technology like, and like how there's. Just even like just beautiful animations. Like I seen the Kraken logo and just like it's there could've been some more moderations too.

[00:49:19] **Matt May:** Yeah, that reminds me of just the Cleveland mascot, sort of one of the iconic images as they were still trying to push back from doing it, was a white person, like dressed

head to toe as the mascot, Chief Wahoo. And so headdress, beads, the whole thing. And he's yelling at an Indigenous activist that's saying, you shouldn't be doing this. And it's like, *that's the thing*! That's the whole thing in one picture. This is why you don't do this.

[00:49:44] **Sadie Red Wing:** It's so frustrating because when I try to explain it to somebody, it's just you don't have to mark yourself as a Viking, as a cowboy when you have to take the census. Here, I still gotta mark American Indian, and then anybody who's Indigenous from the country of India, they had to, mark themselves as Indian American. If you don't know the feeling of being, having an identity associated with a mascot, then I can understand why you're not sharing any empathy.

I want to branch out just a little bit, particularly because what we're talking about is still going on and maybe a little more of a micro sense, but there is so many high schools to this day, 2022 that are mimicking what we're talking about. So again, like I said, like I've been in conversations around like the Chicago Blackhawks talking about their gentleman and talking about, DC, whatever it may be.

You mentioning stuff like Seminoles and we still got the Braves and the Kansas City Chiefs. And I think what needs to be more prominent, particularly in branding, particularly in graphic design is you gotta give greater evidence on what is, exploitating an image and identity and what is not exploiting.

And that line gets really blurred. But again, this is why we just need a really stronger forms of education so that we're not in this again. And I feel like because that is not taught to Native Americans, we're still a little bit more vulnerable and where that line is blurred between exploitation and what is honoring.

The point I'm trying to make is there's no blueprint for this work, particularly for graphic design and working with Indigenous communities. I'm trying to do this work. It's not necessarily maybe develop a blueprint, but just acknowledge that one of the reasons why we're struggling and suffering and talking in circles about conversations, this is no one has developed the blueprint.

[00:51:31] **Matt May:** That was part 1 of our conversation. Our interview ran longer than all the others, and I decided to edit it lightly just like the rest, rather than cut it for length. Sadie covers a lot of the topics that the design community needs to grapple with, and I didn't want to leave any of it behind. This is your opportunity to take a break, maybe have a glass of water, and then pick up part 2 of our interview. That's all for now.

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Appendix F – Episode 6: Interview with Sadie Red Wing, Part 2

[00:00:00] **Matt May:** This is InEx, a show about inclusive design. I'm your host, Matt May. In this episode:

[00:00:09] **Sadie Red Wing:** If graphic designers don't know the land, all right, go to Barnes and Noble, go get a book. And you open a book of seeing what plants are like, the ethnobotany in the area. There's not much connection or a lot of interdisciplinary between ecosystems and graphic design. So I feel like people are missing the point, like they're missing the connections. Like they can't envision what that looks like.

[00:00:31] **Matt May:** Part 2 of my conversation with Sadie Red Wing.

In case you missed it, part one of this interview is still available. If it's not in your feed, you can download it and the transcript at inex.show, or check the show notes for the link. Now let's jump in where we left off.

[00:00:49] **Sadie Red Wing:** One of the reasons why I like to stay in the realm of higher education is because colleges and high schools, the snowball is forming. The dominoes are falling. So if they're seeing national identities, mascots crumble, then there's, ooh, if we're a high school and we know that this is happening and we have a racist mascot, what do we do? To give an example, University of Illinois, Chief Illiniwek, their mascot. December 2021, University of Illinois, put out the imagery implementation plan, meaning that instead of relying on that chief mascot, if you're so dependent on that one emblem where it has a gentleman with a full headdress, if you take that away, then what do you do?

You gotta not necessarily restart from scratch, but as someone who's working within the branding department, or somebody who might be working within admissions were like, ooh, we gotta change our brochures here. We gotta change our view book, or we need to figure out how we're targeting these Native American students, because essentially a lot of institutions across the nation are looking to recruit more Native American students. And if you have a history of either your institution being a boarding school or having a racist mascot, this is going to be a little bit harder to have trust with that demographic. So in thinking about how us as graphic designers,

why this is important within this work and why it's so overlooked it's because there's no blueprint.

I don't think when institutions in the 1800s, early 1900s, or even to mid 1900s, they probably didn't think there's going to be someone like me, talking to this level. So I think every, all that brushing under the rug. Like, the rug's, like not covering anything anymore.

So hence again, another reason why conversations are important like this, so that we can get more Indigenous graphic designers to come in and train admissions on how to go away and how to work on their branding. Particularly if they're dependent on a racist mascot. And then if we can get that "train the trainer" models started in there, then it could be brought into at a high school level.

So I can see, I can anticipate like the snowball roll in. And I think what is challenging, this will go into, decolonization as well. If we take out the person, if we take out the exaggerated gentlemen, what's usually the larger nose. What do we, what would he use?

And then going back to what we were talking about before the break is land tropes. So in means of needing to know what plants are Indigenous to the area, trees, animals foods like all these elements that we can be using as tropes, not exploit them, not exaggerate them, but be creative and build more respectful visual languages for non-Indigenous people to use, to help target us.

I feel like this is where the conversation around decolonization is not being had at that level. Thinking about how do we regenerate land resources that are going to be needed for visual languages when targeting Indigenous demographics. So this is where I come in talking about decolonization, because I could see this conversation being spiraled out.

And we're not necessarily talking about the destruction of land and how that is affective in a graphic design space. Again, if you're not in a position of being experienced, if you're in the United States and you don't have the experience of being colonized by the United States government, then I don't understand how you could be doing de-colonizing work in the United States.

If you're not actually integrating Indigenous populations that are being affected by colonization. So when I'm brought into conversations around decolonization in graphic design, I do two ways. It's a complex layer and at the very root and core it's land, you look at the definition of colonization.

As we're talking about ownership of land, space, territory region, we're not necessarily talking about colonialism. We're not talking about the Bible here. We're not talking about how policies and rules are structured. So think about that military style or thinking about our everyday lives of why are we expected to eat three times a day?

Why do we go kindergarten, school, college, job, retire. Why do we they're expected to be at school at 8, all that structure, policy and rules. That's within a colonial conversation. I feel like that conversation gets thrown on top of colonization. And we never talk about land as graphic designers and talking about colonization, I never hear panels conferences that I'm like I'm always the ones that are like, all right. Land rights, go to the treaties. Let's really talk about colonization here. If a case study is we want to design a better mascot or a better logo or something better, that is more respectful, targeted demographic. We need to research.

And part of that research has seen what plants, or the whole natural resources here. And it's hard. I'm sitting here in Toronto and all I see is concrete jungle. I couldn't tell you what tree is Indigenous here. I couldn't tell you what animal is. I couldn't tell you what fruits are grown here.

So I can understand why it's hard to target the Mississauga tribe here, when I don't see anything that is relevant to what I don't see anything relevant to their stewardship. So meaning that if all tribes, if you translate all tribes, the way that they categorize themselves are always a protector or something.

So I'm Lakota the protector within the prairie, the Navajo-Hopi, they might be protectors within the Grand Canyon. Look at all the Salish tribes, they're protectors within the Northern Pacific, within the tribes down in California, the Southern Pacific, so if it's rooted and ingrained of us to protect these lands, then that's how we want to be targeted.

So if graphic designers don't know the land, all right, go to Barnes and Noble, go get a book. And you open a book of seeing what plants are like, the ethnobotany in the area. There's not much connection or a lot of interdisciplinary between ecosystems and graphic design.

So I feel like people are missing the point, like they're missing the connections. Like they can't envision what that looks like. So when, if you were to take a class of mine, we start on, okay. In the desert, you have these resources and that's reflected in this visual language. Here, let's say within the woodlands area, same thing.

So if you're working, so let me give an example. So working, I was invited to work with a Massachusetts tribe of Wampanoag, implementing a plan for the city of Boston to lease land within their sovereign nation. Now, again, this is nation to nation. It's not a neighborhood asking Boston to rent from them. It's an actual government.

So in a nation to nation, I think another thing that is disconnected with graphic designers is that as a Native American graphic designer, your portfolio is going to demonstrate how to design for an entire government versus a traditional Canadian, American student. Your portfolio is probably going to get you into a design firm or tech firm or something like you, not, you don't have a responsibility to target an entire government.

Like not everybody leaving our, like our students who wouldn't necessarily be submitting to go design for the White House, where I might have a student who needs to go work with their tribal government. So there's not much training in how to design. So if a student's responsibility is design for that tribal government, they're going to have to know what foods are traditional to the area, what animal resources they use, what the migration and patterns within their climate and within the animals in the area.

So when we start to get in this sense, then we, then it starts to feel a little bit like, ooh, like I feel like people can't get away from hearing the word primitive, because if I'm starting talking about animal resources and products, I feel like people start envisioning like cavemen. And that's what I do not want to go down that route.

So one aspect of colonization is one, how do you give visual representation to a nation? And so meaning that if if the Massachusetts tribe is building documentation to work with the city of Boston, what's their letterhead looks like? What kind of business cards do they have?

What's their website? Like it's got to look professional. It has to look like an actual government. And I feel like sometimes people don't think about that. Sometimes another thing too is we, the easiest way, since we're on topic of sports, the easiest way to paint the picture of what this looks like too is if you could see some United States, tribes more active in global events. So United States tribal nations that may participate in like the Olympics or during the break we're talking about lacrosse or if we could see like the FIFA World Cup. I love soccer. I love football. I would love to see like the Iroquois Nation or Seminole Nation or Lakota Nation, like being at the FIFA World Cup.

We're not there yet, but just to really think about if we were in those global events and in those global ceremonies, like the United Nations, they share, pull us into an environment or climate change conference for the United Nations, but elsewhere you don't really see us in a global event.

So sports is the easiest to give an example to. And to bring that home a little bit is when I was working in the Massachusetts tribe, we were talking about wouldn't it be so cool if if tribal nations, the United States all participated in the Little League World Series.

So Little League World Series, they got the word "world" in there. I don't see much in international teams in there, but it's just something that Americans can grasp, meaning that everyone knows what the Little League World Series is. I think it's always in Omaha, Nebraska, and it's like little kids and from all over the nation, they, and they compete in baseball.

Now, what is interesting is that practice of sports is evident and also know that a lot of sports are appropriated from tribes. So it just blows my mind sometimes that you don't see a lot of athletes or stuff, or a lot of Native American initiatives within sports, see maybe a lot in basketball, but it would be so cool to see the sovereign nation Little League World Series.

And let's say that Massachusetts tribe wanted to put a team in. How would you know that tribe was from that little league baseball team, how would you know that they were from a government

in Massachusetts? It's probably going to be based on their design. So let's say that Massachusetts one day wants to have their own little league team to be in the Little League World Series.

They gotta demonstrate their nationality. How do you do that? How do you do that particularly working with a tribe that has little or to none of a solid visual language. Then we get to see what resources are Indigenous to the Boston area. So some of the beautiful things that have been really interesting to learning about the territory is even something about like all the seashells, the colors, designs on seashells, or like crustaceans or how animals that live in shells.

So like thinking like hermit crabs, or maybe not necessarily snails, but thing like Indigenous sea creatures in that area. If you look at their shells, you'll see a lot of spiral patterns. You see a lot of dot patterns, a lot of line patterns, you see a lot of different line patterns in birchbark within wings, within Hawks all of those could be brought into a branding guide.

And it would speak to that tribe. And it'd only speak to that, that arbor area, that Boston bay area and that's beautiful. It gives that identity. So I will have to show some images to share what this process looks like, but that would be an example of demonstrating decolonization through design.

So that is kinda more like the giving identity to a particular territory space, treaty, land, region. The other half of decolonizing design that I don't hear much in graphic design research is a systems is how the system of reciprocity is brought into some of these spaces. And I feel like I don't hear that word reciprocal. And I feel like this is a good term used in inclusivity.

Going back to what would a system look like before colonization, or how do you fix a reciprocal system that worked for thousands of years, but once colonization hit, that the system broke. And there, there's nothing that has been reciprocal.

Let me give an example. At OCAD, there's decolonization and sustainability in the handbook, if you're bringing an Indigenous person to help demonstrate these initiatives from the handbook, we are going to talk about how one, art and design institutions exploit resources. We do it. We're guilty.

I'm guilty myself and I'm guilty of it. But how many post-its I... designers love post-its so think about all the times you're using post-its or just wasting paper, but an example from my class, talk about I want my students to be more sustainable. Let's not be destructive and let's not use land resources or let's think about how we exploit land resources.

So Johannes Gutenberg, printing press. We all know it. Like we got to know it. If you're going to take a graphic site in history class. So when I asked my students do you think Johann Gutenberg knew how damaging his invention would be? Like, maybe he didn't, maybe he didn't because he's not here today to see like how much trees were missing now from all the paper needed, but, thinking back, okay, printing press, boom.

We're cranking out Bibles. We're cranking out letter press, you build one from, wood, build a couple more, build some more, maybe, okay, now we get steel. Now we get some steel ones in there. Now we get like some, different size of letters. So now we're getting more, more weight that has not necessarily, you can pick up a printing press and go.

So you're stuck. You're stuck in one place which doesn't fit into a nomadic tribal lifestyle. Two, now you're cranking out books like books. Now, where were all these books being stored at? They can be started in the house, in the basement, in the cellar, bookshelves libraries, bookstores, stores.

Like it goes on and on. Currency, print out currency, paper, man, that's a lot of trees, like you're like you get to the point where you were in this process from the printing press 500 years down the road. Now we got Amazon, like our tribes in the Amazon are just trying to combat deforestation, like the need of the...

[00:15:35] **Matt May:** ...while Amazon is promoting deforestation, it's a bookstore! That was the first thing that it did there. Yeah.

[00:15:43] **Sadie Red Wing:** So even thinking about like asking students what would this world look like if Johann said, all right, guys. After 10 Bibles printed, let's plant a tree, it's something simple.

Just something like, really think about, okay. Are we thinking about that as designers? Man, like we could think of some really beautiful inventions and get into talking about AI, but I really think about, are we thinking about how this could be damaging seven generations from now, a hundred years from now?

Are we implementing any plans? Of giving back. So if I'm using all this energy, if I'm using all these trees am I happy in some type of plan that it's going to be fruitful? We're not using all these resources till the very end. Like we're not killing them up in the Midwest. We see it through farming, man.

Like I love farming. Like I don't mind farmers, I guess I got ranchers on my family. But when I talk about decolonization, I'm talking about how farmers had just man eliminating our buffalo and you're killing our soil. Then we get into conversations or regeneration. So these conversations around systems, regeneration, exploiting land resources, that's decolonizing, that's colonization.

And I feel like designers, graphic designers and system designers. We should be bringing this conversation around climate change. I don't see that happening in, in this aspect, but how this trails into inclusivity and talking about reciprocal cycle, something that function and works. Now we can talk about how a tribe has developed that, man.

It took us a thousand years to establish a hierarchy. So maybe thinking about how we do chess pieces or whatever, but think about hierarchy, a tribe. This is why it's so hard for my job. Cause you can't, it's hard to envision this, but if we, so let's say that everybody who was protecting the prairie from Calgary, all the way down to the Carolinas, we had to plan out how we assembled people to take care of all that grass, all that grassland, let alone, we had to follow the buffalo and the buffalo tilled that soil and men, that's all, that was our life for thousands of years, it was just making sure that the buffalo continued within their pattern because that's kept our soil alive.

And I never thought to this day, that'd be advocating for tall grass. But the point of that is understanding that how we set up how we set up people to have a duty, a responsibility. And if they do their task, that is going to have a goal and a responsibility and it works. And that in that system or that community, or the group of people set up in a way that it works, it'll be reciprocal, man, that, that reciprocal framework can go for thousands of years.

And that's what we really need in this space. And talking about inclusivity, I come into the space of look, tribes, work. Like I am one of the few in the United States, in Canada, and speaking as someone as a tribal member is I know what a tribe is. Like I literally am in a tribe. Like I should be the expert to know what it's like to not be a individual.

So in these spaces around being inclusive, I think of it as a tribe. And I don't necessarily hear those same frameworks or hierarchies of how a tribe works and a reciprocal pattern. It's evident that we have been living for thousands of years, but when you bring that timeline into today and even a smaller timeline in the realm of graphic design there could be some use of some of that traditional or that historical context that could be useful.

So even to just seeing how, if there's in a workspace or in a business space, and if you're just not getting along, because you can't put your differences aside, you're not being inclusive, then there's no reciprocity. These goals aren't getting completed. I feel like in, in areas that need to be inclusive the most, why aren't they looking at tribal professional spaces of tribal members who have to put their differences aside and work. And at the end of the day, it's about a responsibility goal. And what's your task to do that. And I feel like that idea of system I'd feel like people are missing the mark and talking about that in decolonization and inclusivity.

[00:19:56] **Matt May:** Okay. Yeah. So let's talk about this. Systems thinking is something that really dovetails with inclusive design, because at least from my perspective, inclusive design can't start from a perspective of, how can I get away with the thing that I always wanted to do?

Like you, can't just hide away that harm is being done somewhere else by the core thing that you want to do. There has to be some sense that you are actually willing to change the thing that you were planning on doing, based on the information that you gain from doing this inclusion work.

So, let's put our differences aside, let's think about things in a collective sense, that kind of gets to the heart of inclusive design.

I want to get into the theory part of this and how it connects to design communities. And I want to separate kind of the differences between what I call lowercase inclusive design and uppercase

Inclusive Design, right? If you say "inclusive design" to people, people know the word inclusive, they know the word design, and then it's just anything that connects those two things.

And it doesn't really necessarily mean that it's not still exploitive, it's not still extractive, it's not still colonialized. It's just that they see a different face in the marketing, that kind of thing. But when we talk about inclusive design at OCAD and, the Inclusive Design Research Centre, which is part of OCAD University, but their definition is the inclusive design is "design that is inclusive of the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age, and other forms of human difference." And that practically this requires things like participatory action research and co-design. Ultimately, you don't get that far in inclusivity without an actual dialogue, not we read the book and we got what we wanted out of it, but that there are actual people in the room and that they have agency in the discussion that you're starting.

Sometimes that means, you don't do the thing that you wanted to do. If you're not willing to understand that maybe the way that you're doing this is wrong, then there's no path forward to this. It's really just empty gestures to do that work.

And so I wanted to think to talk about, in general, how do you see those kinds of values instilled in design culture today? Like, how do you see us teaching this to generations of designers that are coming up wherever they may be?

[00:22:18] **Sadie Red Wing:** I think maybe the best way I can share this is try to paint a picture of how it makes sense to me. And again, this is just me based on my rhetorical criticism, my experience, how I identify.

I think there's been times where I felt like I haven't been included or maybe I was included and acknowledged in say, a classroom. So let's say we're talking to a classroom. So I'm a student I'm with my colleagues, my cohort, and and maybe we're discussing a homework assignment or reading or whatever.

And I feel if I share my input or my 2 cents or share my thoughts on whatever the material may be. If someone doesn't get what I'm saying, it's either ignored or it's oh, okay, good point. All right, on to the next, there's no one helping me flesh out, okay, am I making sense?

There's not that response in the exchange. I feel like sometimes when we're bringing ideas that have a strong have a longer history, I feel like there's just still that line of what primitive is.

And I hate being in that category or having any type of relation to a caveman. It bothers me. If I'm talking about natural resources, particularly within graphic design, and I might be speaking about a particular animal part, I'm not designing or talking about like time period of the Flintstones. I think it's just hard for people to bridge because of the history is just not there. So designers, man, we love fishbowl. We love being a meeting spaces. Like we love sitting around the table. We love our post-its. We love our Sharpies, whatever, our mind maps and whatnot. So let's say that Seattle or New York City or Toronto is wanting to bring a group of designers of all identities into a space.

And if the design problem is how to help relieve like the homeless problem. We're all designers here help design a solution and think about how we can make more sustainable housing for our homeless. If I'm in a room and there's people of different nationalities, ideas, experiences, whatever it may be, I'm coming in with my own in, if I'm saying, okay, we're talking about homeless, we're talking about shelter.

If I'm the designer here, I'm probably writing down buffalo. I'm probably writing teepee. You're probably going to need trees. Are probably gonna need sinew. I'm writing all these things down because I think people forget that my style of home is a teepee.

And I'm putting my post-its up and I'm seeing other people, talking about solar panels or just something not relevant to, let's say a particular animal.

So I said, okay, so if I'm a designer presenting my idea, somebody who has traditional ecological knowledge, our knowledge passed down to me that was shared from thousands of years. I know one thing. So if I'm looking at my post-it and my post-it says buffalo skin, I know buffalo hide is temperature control, climate control. Inside the buffalo hide can keep the climate controlled.

I'm just gonna say from 68, 72 degrees. Anything inside buffalo skin, it will stay that temperature. So if people are like how'd, y'all survive like in the blizzards back then? Because the buffalo skin protected us. If we were going through the desert, anything like triple digits heat, anything inside

that buffalo skin, you wouldn't be able to feel it. If I know that a natural resource can be climate controlled, that's my 2 cents being brought in.

Now if someone next to me, I feel like in some sense, we're in spaces where I feel it doesn't feel inclusive. If someone laughed at that, if someone said, "Ew, we're talking about building homes for homeless. You want them to live in animal skin?" I feel like people like just really like shit on that idea to the point where, okay, now it sounds corny. Now it sounds like a caveman. Now it sounds primitive. But in reality, you don't need to make a teepee for these homeless people in New York. All I'm telling you is that I know buffalo skin is climate controlled.

Get an architect, maybe find a way to invent a form of housing that can incorporate tradition or an animal product that might be more useful, sustainable, eco-friendly, than bringing in more steel, than bringing it into more trees and whatnot. I feel like people miss the mark. I think we just live in a world where like, no, it'd be nice to live in a condo or make a little like hotel or whatever for them.

The inclusivity aspect is we'll include my idea. Like we're scientists, we're designers. Like he doesn't have to be what it looked like in 1800s. Let's design something. All I'm bringing, is the science of it. We didn't need a textbook thousands of years ago to tell us that buffalo hide was climate controlled.

That is where we that's our advantage coming in, is that we known that for thousands for seven plus generations. And it's a solid idea. It's a scholarly idea. It's an idea that shouldn't be shit on or made fun.

[00:27:10] **Matt May:** And it's actually, there's a project right now that that I'm aware of that's going on through the American Indian Higher Education Consortium that's about indigenizing knowledge.

To write into textbooks, open educational resources. My advisor, Jutta Treviranus has been working, with AIHEC. I've worked with AIHEC. And we're aware of these kinds of projects. And so there's this synthesis of, look, we know this about farming because we've been here longer than 200 years. These are things that have sustained us for hundreds or thousands of years.

And almost, if this is the only way you're going to learn it, if the only way that you're going to engage with this is if it's in a textbook, then great. Here's a textbook, right? You're talking about this as science and if it fits as science it's almost like the Indigenous community is doing an inclusive design project with all the colonizers, everybody that's come in after, to say look, here's, North America: a guide. Here are the things that you need to know about this. And it's interesting from that inclusive design perspective, to see that kind of collaboration happening without it having been a methodology. The fact that engagement occurs is what's important.

[00:28:29] **Sadie Red Wing:** Yeah. For listeners who may not be able to get to see our reaction, when Matt said, AIHEC, I just lit up because I participate AIHEC, I won awards at AIHEC. I'm just happy that was very referenced.

Another thing that I noticed, is there is still that presence or that feeling of either someone, an individual pushing ideas onto a group. In the United States, a lot of the Indigenous communities are always faced with the somewhat depressing health facts. We have high rates of suicide. We have high rates of missing people. We have high rates of alcoholism. We have high rates of diabetes, high rates of all these ailments within us. And it's always seems instead of asking what the tribal nations want to combat some of these health issues, I feel like we get free stuff forced onto us. Like me.

And ooh, like you guys, we took away your food. We're feeding you this shit food. Now you're unhealthy.

[00:29:28] **Matt May:** I have a concrete example of this because I was talking about living on the Navajo Nation. The reason I was there, was that my mom married a guy who ran the dialysis unit at the Indian Health Service center there.

And the reason the dialysis rates were so high had to do with diet , alcohol consumption. All of these things that had come along with the colonization of the of the vicinity. At least last time I was there, if you drove out of the Navajo Nation in any direction, before you hit a town, you hit a liquor store.

Because the nation itself is dry. So here we create the poison and then we say, but this is the cure, right? Here's the health center that's going to dialyze you three times a week because we created the problem. I think that gets close to what you're talking about.

[00:30:16] **Sadie Red Wing:** Exactly. Cause you're yep. Meaning that more clinics are brought into area. More gyms, more programming. You get set up with physicians and therapists, but they're still missing that core of what we need. If you ask the community what they wanted, instead of these nutrition plans where you have to drive three hours to go to the grocery store, to even get just healthier ingredients that are not commodities.

It's just the whole system. Instead of what you just shared, before those dialysis treatment centers were created or any form of rehab or whatever it may be, if they ask the tribe first, the tribe is always going to say, we want our land rights because we want to hunt. We want our land rights because we want to grow our foods. And we want all these access so that when we exercise, we can do it in a form of how we did within our ceremonies. So thinking about our, when we pray and run, and if you are cutting us off, I'm putting these in these little isolated areas with boundaries, like we just don't have those areas to explore particularly around, within like national parks too.

So I guess the point is like, if you want us to be healthier and eat healthier, let us grow our food, but you're not letting us grow our food because you're not letting us be stewards of the land. You want us to be more active? You don't let us practice our ceremonies, or our dances. You expect us to be in the gyms, but there's so much natural areas we could be exploring or utilizing to get us out of the house or to let us have our daily practices.

Yeah, I guess the point in being about a little bit more inclusive instead of seeing someone weaker or someone who might demonstrate more subordinate state, just because they don't fit in what a modern 2022 lifestyle is, we can improve our health in traditional ways too.

It's just that there's again, there's no call and response. There's that research, that competency isn't there. No, one's hearing us on what we want. And thinking about systems and think about inclusive. This is why it's important to hear other people's needs and bringing us to these tables so that, okay. Maybe we gave them three gyms. That's a lot of steel. When you think about how

much steel goes into a gym, like all those weights and whatnot or is any of those weights gonna be biodegradable? And you absolutely hammered on that nail, you gotta know what the community wants, you can't force all these, what you think that they need in there. And that's something that needs to be talked about in conversation about being inclusive, particularly when targeting a particular demographics.

I always use those two as examples.

[00:32:43] **Matt May:** If you had two minutes to talk to every designer, how would you give an indigeneity inclusion and equity discussion and in two minutes? All of the things that they don't learn? Your AIGA Eye on Design talks about how your experience wasn't inclusive, it didn't talk about Indigenous design, this is something that's going to be common, I think, among a lot of the these interviews. What's missing, that if somebody is in design school and they're not learning anything other than like, how to use Photoshop? What things should they be looking into?

[00:33:13] **Sadie Red Wing:** Oh, that's a really good one.

I feel like you need to know when I say place, like actual location of where you're at. These conversations that we're having in something like a podcast is going to be a resource.

If it's going to be used in the United States or used in North America, make sure that you know how to define these words and make sure how they're demonstrated based on the location. This whole time we've been talking about the importance of needing to know natural resources from the United States.

You need to know how particular frameworks that were done pre birth of the US government. And I feel like some people are quick to say that that's in the past. That's not useful now, but when you are in a situation around climate change, climate change is being taught in education, in law, in government, in health, whatever it may be.

And if graphic designers and designers are some of the first that have to interact with some of these conversations or social issues, then I feel like we need to be ahead of the game and do a little bit more in thinking about humanity, I would say.

One of the reasons why I feel like we're at the head of the game is because I always see the word design as something like invent. And if you, if we are the experts in invention, our inventions better be useful and sustainable and be fruitful and be able to work. If designers are calling themselves inventors, we are the ones developing the models. We are the ones developing the infrastructure. A designer has to design a school before you can get kids into school and them to get a degree and out. So design is always gonna come first.

If we come first in any form and invention that is going to demonstrate human existence, then we better make sure that what we invent does, its job has responsibility. The tasks are done and it continues to work. If it doesn't work, then what do designers do? We go back to the *problem* and try to design a solution. I feel like we should be mindful of how powerful we are as people. Particularly as designers, as graphic designers are very powerful because we are the ones that allow someone to see their language. We allow someone to see their identity cause we give visual proof that something exists.

And I feel like we don't think of ourselves as individuals with that much power. So I would say the last 15 seconds of my two minutes was to remind ourselves the power that we have as inventors and as someone that gives visual proof of existence. And if we are the first ones going into battle, then we better have our strategy planned. And if we don't, then we're not going to survive.

[00:35:55] **Matt May:** All right. We're going to take a pause here and then we will get into thoughts about the future. So we'll be right back with Sadie Red Wing.

On the next episode of InEx:

[00:36:12] **Joshua Halstead:** We're not going to complete it. We're not going to complete the work. Like there is no work to complete in my opinion, it's ongoing development... I think that, to say that we're going to make an inclusive world in a hundred years is a little bit pompous.

[00:36:24] **Matt May:** A conversation with Joshua Halstead.

All right. Let's talk about equity first. We talked a little bit about just an Indigenous perspective of equanimity, I guess you could say. That everybody's working together toward a common purpose.

So when the discussion of equity comes up in design circles, we're usually talking about the shared ownership of things.

And I know that it's a Western framing. It's a colonialist framing for things, to talk about ownership. But when we talk about everyone having an equal opportunity to participate in the system, what would that mean?

How would we get to the point that Indigenous knowledge and traditions and practices are considered like you mentioned in the last segment as a peer, as a tool in a broader toolkit of humanity, if you will.

[00:37:12] **Sadie Red Wing:** Yeah. I think immediately when I hear the word equity, or someone who's experienced being in an inequitable environment or not having particular resources or support, or just don't have everything that everyone else has.

And I see that a lot, particularly in design communities, around technology and particularly around software. Again, I'm not speaking for all Indigenous nations in North America, but there are a lot of nations that have the stress of or they have had mentioned the word extinction in their conversation around existence. Now, if a language like a verbal language, even a visual language, if a verbal language is on the verge of extinction, there should be an emergency of keeping that language alive.

English is not going extinct anytime soon. There is no bat symbol up saying that there's an emergency. If English is on the verge of extinction, I guarantee you, there's going to be more people working to save the English language than there are right now saving the Indigenous language.

But let's say that we want to save an Indigenous language and we want to save an Indigenous language that doesn't write in Roman forms or characters, or maybe the form of writing is maybe more symbol based. We see this with other non Latin scripts that the software and tools that we use within our laptops.

They can't write language. If you read left to right to left up or down, whatever it is, there's many softwares that don't allow a lot of the non Western, non Latin languages to work within a laptop space. We're seeing more and more prototypes and more and more betas. So I know you can get an iPhone, you can get in the Cherokee syllabi or you can get it in the Cherokee language.

But if a language is progressing and transforming with the introduction of Roman characters, again, it's not doing its whole part on saving the language. It can be a little bit dumb, but we have to have that Roman influence to survive now. And it sucks to be dependent on it. And I wish that there was more activity in building more and more software and resources for those aspects.

What is interesting being in that space of previously may have been near extinction was, we have the need to build any resource and in means of talking about technology. And this is what is the beautiful side.

We talked a lot about negatives. We talked a lot about more gloomy stuff, but on the beautiful side of the sensitive work is that this is one, another reason why I'm going to be working until I'm a hundred, is that you don't see Indigenous represented in anything that you interact with every day. So right now I got an Ikea desk every time I know where Ikea's from. It's European, and it's Swedish, Scandinavian. Every time when I see this Ikea desk, I'm reminded of that. Could you imagine if there was one tribe in the United States and they had their own Ikea, meaning that you bought light bulbs, you bought dishes.

So every time you saw that light bulb or that dish, or maybe you bought a pillow and you knew that it came from a native nation, then you can be like, ah, like there is some type of existence. So when you think about, when you look in your homes or your dorm rooms or whatever. You don't see anything.

I wish I could go to a sovereign nation and buy a laptop made from a Native American nation, their own government. I wish there was a tribe just with a large workshop and just outputting Lamborghinis and Ferraris. Cause I love to buy a high-end like vehicle that was made by a warehouse from a tribal nation.

You don't see any of that fast food a little bit, not so much, but I still can't go into Mall of America or still can't go into a mall in LA or Seattle, or maybe Seattle where there isn't a fast food chain that has Native American food. Just even something like that.

What being inequitable means to me is that because of colonization, I can't have my fruits. So one fruit that I eat is chokecherries. I can go, I can't go into any grocery store and get a pint of chokecherries.

I can go get a pint of blueberries, no problem. Maybe even a pint of huckleberries. If I was in Washington I can get raspberries, I can get strawberries, some kiwi, we can get dragon fruit. I can get star fruit. I can get papaya, but I can't go into any grocery store and get a pint of chokecherries, and that fruit is from here.

And that blows my mind. And one of the reasons why we can't get chokecherries is because we have stupid laws in South Dakota, like the war party law, where if there's more than five natives on a particular property, they can be shot at. So of course there's not natives picking chokecherries out there.

If two natives picking chokecherries, can't pick enough chokecherries to send pints of chokecherries to all the grocery stores. Like that sucks to me. Because of that. I don't have any candy flavors that are chokecherries. I can't go get a chokecherry Red Bull. I can't get a chokecherry kombucha. I can't even get a chokecherry cough drop. If I want something similar to that. And we do within our or remedies that we get, naturally, like juniper berries, or if I could get chokecherry, like I'd have to go pick them myself. But again that's myself. I don't have the resources where it's right there.

Like I can go into a gas station and I can get an aloe water or even a White Claw. Like I can't get a chokecherry flavor, like White Claw, or just even any type of like beer flavor or whatnot, but it sucks. And even when I think about technology, I think about the future I would love to live in a future where I could get all those things.

I would love to live in a future where I can talk to my Siri or Amazon Alexa, and we could talk in Lakota. I have a calendar right here. I love to have my own traditional calendar of a winter

account. And I wish I could just go to Walmart or Target or wherever I go buy calendars at Barnes and Noble and get that stuff.

I feel like people don't think about those types of things or they don't think about what a world they live in would look like if there was more representation. We're so used to seeing stuff like Panda Express, Taco Bell. But what about like a buffalo burger, a food chain. Buffalo meat's healthier. We got seven tribal nations that know how to herd buffalo. Man, take away our casinos, and we can start building higher consumer goods for buffalo meat, man, it'd be more nation to nation relationship building. I hope I can live to see a world that day.

But then also what is so exciting is I'm really starting to plan and brainstorm yeah. If Amazon Alexa was going to speak Lakota, then that allows opportunity for Lakota people to work with Amazon. We were talking about Amazon a little bit earlier and their response to a question is that, oh, we never thought about that.

I feel like when someone says, I never thought about that, it still gives a feeling of inequity to me. Designers, man. We, we do all this, we invent all this. It could be a mouse, table, whatever it may be, but just because you don't see these products that have any type of representation. At a big national level, like there's families, held family owned businesses Midwest as a strong homesteading in relationships in our inter national relationships with like Amish communities or maybe more, maybe other non-Indigenous communities that live off the land.

There's ways to get these type of things, but I don't have access. Like I can't just walk up to a dollar store and go get something that is relevant to my identity. And it just blows my mind because we're right here. Like I'm not going to go, I'm not going to go across seas to go get me a pint of chokecherries.

It'd just be nice to just get them here.

[00:44:51] **Matt May:** That gives me an idea of kind of the future that you want. Are there any other touch points, things that you want either to be doing yourself as a designer or in a collective, or just that you want, that you never going to get to? What do you want the future to look like?

[00:45:04] **Sadie Red Wing:** Yeah, I want a store with everything that I mentioned.

[00:45:08] **Matt May:** Chokecherries, got that.

[00:45:09] **Sadie Red Wing:** Chokecherries. So day in the life, day in the life. I want to wake up. I want to be in a bed that I didn't get from Ikea. I got it shipped from a sovereign nation. A Denver mattress. This is a well-known mattress. I want to, for a tribe near Denver, I want to buy a mattress from them. I want to get up and make breakfast. I'm going to have like my traditional foods. So I want chokecherry syrup with my pancakes. I have chokecherries in them. And then I want my coffee. Just everyday things.

And it's so weird that I'm saying it out loud, that I don't have those things. And I it's low key jealousy where like maybe one of my friends, maybe from Bosnia or even like Japan, where they can live in Canada, United States, and they can formulate a daily life that has some type of historical context and identity.

But I don't. So it'd be nice to just see some more variety of either flavors, a particular food genres of particular foods, but what is interesting and why I want this so much is because our resources are healthy. They're not destructive. Chokecherries are good for you. It's not sugar. It's not alcohol. It's not killing you. It's everything we're advocating for: clean water, clean air, better ways of preserving land. It's all positive. So I just don't get it.

I would love for one day, and I'm just saying this out of spite too. I would love for one day that I could have a student submit a thesis and explain to me why gold is still an addiction when we can't drink or eat gold. It's heavy too. I'm waiting for someone to open that can of worms, along with oil.

Where I see myself is really defining and painting a picture of what a nation to nation looks like working together. Yes, there's this nasty history between the United States and tribal nations and Canada and their tribal nations, but I just think no one's painted that picture and no one has implemented any systems to demonstrate how that works.

Another thing is the technology aspect. I think a fear that I have, and I know that this is going to be coming up in my research too, is that technology or just conversation workshops and conferences around artificial intelligence is reaching rural farming areas. And I'm curious to know if there's any Indigenous perspective and programming those artificial intelligence, who might be working with prairie spaces. I know there are advocates out there and revitalizing the prairie, Indigenous or not, but just meaning that if you're not including a traditional forms of tilling soil, that might be helpful. And that's not included in how you're programming AI in these rural spaces. Particularly conservative spaces. That's a fear for me.

So I hope that the word protocol of Indigenous knowledge can be brought into some of this technology that is intended to keep regeneration going in a reciprocal form. And yeah, one of these days in our lifetime, I'd like to sit at a Little League World Series and it's all sovereign nations and not states.

So the only way that world is going to be created is if the curriculum's there, the motivation's there. And if there is greater opportunity to bring some of this important language of actual what ecological knowledge means, what sovereignty means. I know now we're listening to how Russia the, between Russia and Ukraine and how they say Ukraine is a sovereign nation.

I wish United States would give that same impression on when they mentioned tribes as sovereign nations, that they would treat us like a actual country. So one day, if I hope I see someone with my tribes flag in the Olympics, or hopefully one day I'll catch a FIFA World Cup game. And it has more tribes from the United States and Canada.

And hopefully one day our tribes down in Mexico will get federally recognized too, because we've got a lot of knowledge that is kept in a lot of Indigenous languages. And if you're killing off the people who can translate those that could possibly save for a transition away from harmful technologies and a harmful things that we're putting in our bodies, like medicine and foods, like we're we got it. Like we got the playbook for it, so hopefully we can see that playbook being brought to life.

[00:49:28] **Matt May:** Great. Last question. Who would you point to, who do you want our listeners to look into the work that you think is really great and important that every designer should know about?

[00:49:41] **Sadie Red Wing:** I get a lot of inspiration and a lot of mentorship from a variety of folks. And I would say before the generation, before me was doing this work, but I feel like we just, weren't as a society, we weren't as knowledgeable in these conversations as before.

So I feel bad that some of the Native American graphic designers that are progressing or that are getting a little bit more older in, not in these conversations, I'd feel bad because their work would be more relevant now than it would have been 20 years ago or 10 years ago, five years ago, even.

But for sure, I acknowledge and appreciate two gentlemen, one Ryan Redcorn. He has probably been the first Native American graphic designer who inspired or gave really good evidence of like good quality visual sovereignty in using a tribe's visual language in a way that is a little bit more modern and it works, and this is designed very well.

And then also what has been nice of Ryan Redcorn's work is that he's part of the 1491s, which is comedy group. And they just had Reservation Dogs on Hulu be produced. I want to see some more, it'd be nice to have a little bit more show selections on streaming platforms.

I think what inspired me to on Ryan Redcorn's work is that as a way of advocating, he, man, like in movements that graphic designers do to get away with the racist mascots, man, Ryan Redcorn, all his campaigns and stuff. He was the one who was doing the Washington Caucasians or potato skins or foreskins or whatever. Buffalo Nickel Creative. Like they just do humorous work, satire work, but also very moving work that has been influential in these movements that has been allowing us to progress in a positive direction. So I appreciate his work and have been very fortunate to speak on our within interviews.

I think we did a radio interview one time and so I have a lot of respect for him. Greg Deal is another one, G R E G, D E A L. Greg Deal, another gentleman. Having work that is a little bit more contemporary, modern, maybe some punk influence, but I think what I admire of Greg's deal is

he's a performance artist too. So yes, he is good at murals and does stuff within the DC area, but then he also uses his body in a sense of showing action or meaning.

When you have been advocating these values for over a hundred years, how do you get someone to see you? What I feel like when I use the word fuck and fuck the stereotype. If I didn't use profanity in that title... so that's why I like about Greg Deal is, sometimes you gotta put yourself out there and it might be an uncomfortable position to make yourself be heard and I respect his choices. So those are my two men influence.

And then women. With Ryan and Greg, they're eating at my table. So think about who's eating at the table here. I do have to add Dori Tunstall, been an amazing mentor, and just really has matured me in a space of how to demonstrate these values in actual working level. If you're a teacher or your have any type of stakeholding position at a university, how do you bring all these feelings and actually demonstrate and make professional work? So she's been beautiful and very helpful in that sense, as a mentor.

Another mentor who has strong inspirations to me and that I think everyone should check out too, is Denise Gonzales Crisp. She was my chair at North Carolina State. You might be able to catch a theme here, but just those who are not afraid to push the envelope just a little bit, not afraid to be out there, show a little bit more courage and bravery. And I feel like within her work, particularly within the seventies or within the feminism movements within California.

And there's all this stuff that she's done as a female, I feel like she's been really influential and guiding me as I'm maturing to be a professional woman in the graphic design space. Ryan, Greg, Dori, Denise, and then Nita Abdullah. She had popped us a beautiful Pakistani designer teacher at Pratt University.

And we may not have cultural competency, but we have empathy and understand what historical trauma is. And again, if you are a demographic that has a historical trauma and may have been underrepresented or not inclusive included in some of these areas she has been my area of support.

And I feel like we need that. I feel like it's in means of inspiration. We do need support too. Nita is is very influential. And then last I'll wrap it up Neebin Southall. If you Google Native American graphic designers, her link might come up. She has the Native American graphic design project and I respect her work so much as a means of just being an individual to go and collect all these Native American graphic designers. Because I feel like you ask someone to name 10 graphic designers, even five graphic designers. They can't so neat. And Neebin has been putting herself in a position of responsibility of collecting all lists of all ages and all generations.

And it's unfortunate that we don't have a bigger list and we don't have a library of it. And I think people forget that we still have a lot of progression to go. We don't have stock photography. We don't have a collection archive of all this, so we're building it now.

So Ryan, Greg, Dori, Denise, Nita and Neebin would be all my designers that are very influential supportive, inspiring. I think everyone should check out their work. And I think we all share the values of being strong and really pushing to a greater purpose. Again, this work is about positivity.

It's about going in the right direction. It's not about negative or destruction, so that's why I go to great.

[00:55:20] **Matt May:** Sadie Red Wing, thank you so much for for sitting down with me. This has been fantastic and yeah. Thank you for sharing your knowledge with me.

[00:55:28] **Sadie Red Wing:** Absolutely. Thank you so much. I again, if anyone wants to reach out or the best way to get a hold of me, I'm not super active on social media, but everything, all my handles are just my name. so @sadieredredwing or sadieredwing@gmail.com, I'm totally open for yeah. Again, if anyone has questions need to go further in depth. We need to reconnect. We might have to do another podcast on sports.

[00:55:50] **Matt May:** I didn't know that I was going to do a sports podcast this morning. So now we, now I got to do it.

[00:55:56] **Sadie Red Wing:** I'll be ready when that project is ready. But again, Matt, it's been a pleasure. I just had a ball. I'm just very happy to get a chance to share and yeah, best wishes. And I'm anxious for you to walk the stage pretty soon.

[00:56:10] **Matt May:** Oh, so am I. So am I. All right. Thank you.

That's our show.

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Appendix G – Episode 7: Interview with Josh Halstead

[00:00:00] **Matt May:** This is InEx, a show about inclusive design. I'm your host, Matt May. In this episode:

[00:00:09] **Joshua Halstead:** We're not going to complete it. We're not going to complete the work. Like there is no work to complete in my opinion, it's ongoing development... I think that, to say that we're going to make an inclusive world in a hundred years is a little bit pompous.

[00:00:21] **Matt May:** A conversation with Joshua Halstead.

First off, a brief apology. I had every technical difficulty in the world on the day this was recorded. I couldn't get my podcasting mic working. So you'll hear me coming through my webcam. Sorry about that. The good news is that Joshua's sound is fine. And he's the one you're here for anyway. Here's the interview.

And it is my pleasure at this time to introduce you all to Joshua Halstead. Thank you for joining us. Joshua is a scholar working at the intersection of critical theory, design studies and critical access studies, a recognized contributor to disability design discourse. His primary project is that of conjoining, aesthetics, and access to provoke questions about the conditions and possibilities of participation. Halstead has been an invited lecture in academic and professional settings from Stanford to Google, and is coauthor of Extra Bold, a Feminist, Inclusive, Anti-Racist, Non-Binary Field Guide for Graphic Designers. He's an assistant professor at ArtCenter College of Design, and adjunct faculty at California College of the Arts.

Thank you for doing this interview with me.

[00:01:30] **Joshua Halstead:** Absolutely. It's a pleasure to be here.

[00:01:32] **Matt May:** And before we get started, I also wanted to do the land acknowledgment. OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Huron-Wendat. Joshua and I are presently on the ancestral traditional territories of the Duwamish and Coast Salish Peoples, and the

unceded lands of the Ramaytush and Ohlone People, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we stand and create.

To get started, I usually just ask everybody to tell us where you come from, what was your design journey?

And I actually have autobiographical data to back that up from from the book, but I wanted to give you the chance just to talk about it from your perspective.

[00:02:16] **Joshua Halstead:** Awesome. Yeah. I was born and raised and went to all the way through my undergraduate education and Southern California.

And I, growing up, I always found, some interesting context is I grew up in a very kind of physically and sports oriented family. My dad was a marathon runner. My brother was I'm the oldest of three. My brother went through baseball, his whole adolescent life, plays semi-professional baseball. My sister likewise did softball her entire adolescent life. And it was part of the kind of us Olympic softball team and my mom and dad owned a gym. Having a disability in that context, I think was I don't think I know it was very interesting.

And at the same time, both my parents really invited me to explore creativity. So from an early age, I found refuge in creating, I would paint, I would draw I would, go up, we lived at the base of mountains and I'd take solo hikes, and then read creative writing. So I had this kind of home and refuge in creative expression and getting out of the context a little bit. There's maybe a little bit of escapism there.

But nonetheless I developed a love and a personal reflexive practice and forged an identity in the arts. And from kind of an immediate start and drawing and painting. I found graphic design in high school when I was participating in this Led Zeppelin cover band and we needed a cover for fictitious album. And the name of our band was Midnight Sun, actually, as I'm thinking about it, this is actually junior high. That got me into Photoshop, which you would be very familiar with.

And then got me into illustrator, which led to InDesign. So at the end of high school I had re-packaged this artistic sensibility and drive into graphic design as a discipline applied and got into

ArtCenter. And we could talk a little bit more if we want about that experience, but to summarize graduated and began a career in San Francisco, moved and moved from Southern California to San Francisco and began my career at Landor Associates where I did branding and marketing, a number of years. And this is all also when I started to, at the tail end of my career at Landor, dive into the topic of disability, because at that point I hadn't politicized it for myself and I hadn't really imagined its potential as a creative lens up until I was asked to give a presentation about it. Inclusive design specifically.

Yeah, my roots are in like pen and ink stippling in abstract painting. That led to a punk rock sensibility all the way through ArtCenter and deconstructing and tearing apart the Swiss typography canon that I was given. And somehow they accepted me at Landor, and then I started to the construct that canon also through the lens of disability.

So trying to stitch some continuity in the story for you.

[00:05:32] **Matt May:** Yeah. That touch point of recognizing one's disability as a creative tool or a different perspective, I think is something that comes to people or doesn't, it can happen anywhere over their career. I had known about my disability back through at least high school and my embracing it as an identity happened even well after I got into accessibility. That idea that maybe there was something about this that was a tool that could help, other people came later. Just reading through your parts of the book, Extra Bold, I think there were a few touch points for you as well. I don't know if you want to talk about the cuff, for example, but just little pieces of how the disability and the art the artistry came about.

Really just the interplay between the artifacts that you use to be creative, and finding a way for you to express yourself using what was there. Because I think that's usually the point at which you start having, a dialectic, like a conversation with the tools that you have and how they work for you.

[00:06:47] **Joshua Halstead:** Yeah. Yeah. That's great. So it's such a good question. I appreciate that you brought in the concept of dialectic because I do feel that in my early career, there was this reflexive relationship between the material limitations and conditions of my creativity. So whether it be a pen or a paintbrush or, duct tape to fasten these things on my hand, or even like

writing on a piece of paper and having the paper curl as I was trying to write on the top of it and that either being acceptable or unacceptable to my grade school teachers.

My engagement as a maker revealed in many ways, my body, to me over time. The objects themselves had this kind of dialectic affect to where I could understand not just my physical body, but my social body and my hermeneutic body, like how I existed in kind of terms of meaning or how I existed in society and how I existed physically.

Limitations, opportunities, all that stuff. So the cuff is this just to describe it early on, and I've talked about this in a talk and I read about it in the book. Because my hands are composed in such a way that they don't grab, my engagement with just mark-making tools. So pen crayon, marker. All of that in my early life was fairly non-existent until my family and spearheaded by my mom and found a way to fasten these things on my hand.

And early on, I remember that the pen not being designed before my hand posing this original question, it's like what's going on here? What does it mean that all of the things available to me to express myself aren't available? So I remember that kind of being this original huh, what's happening here in the material world. And then also my mom, with the help of my dad and me transgressing that, right?

So I'm making an adaptation and doing design. That was like my first design project. It was doing this thing and it ended up being a wetsuit material that was sewn in such a way that it looped around my left hand and was able to act as a fixture to put a pen or a paintbrush or a marker underneath it fastened my hand.

This is after the first design iteration of duct tape, which didn't work very well. They weren't really worked, but then it, left me in pain.

[00:09:16] **Matt May:** Yeah, not great.

[00:09:19] **Joshua Halstead:** I think that the cuff showed me the politics of creativity. It also showed me the politics of materiality, who can or can't participate in creative, making production.

What I think was interesting about that also was the cuff showed me, and this is before 10, that the conditions of the world, could be transformed. Which again, like if I'm searching for an origin point of what radicalized me, it's really making a cuff. Well, markers, even though they might be the most ready-made conventionally mainstream, mark-making device and they don't work for me, that doesn't have to be the world. I can intervene in the world via design to participate in the world. That was a really interesting thing.

What was interesting also though, is that there was this interaction between the pen and the cuff that produced different marks. So I remember, early on in my art career, being really frustrated because I couldn't with hard and fast, fastened pen, I couldn't make the different line qualities in a thin and thick and angled, et cetera.

This kind of calligraphic line that I really wanted to make. I really looked up to, typographers and folks who were really doing, folks like Doyle Young.

Then I remember there was a point at the end of my art career, which I think, this, we could take this thread anywhere we want. Because the question is about my relationship with the tools. There was a teacher that Allowed me, it was a 3D, three-dimensional shop class. I went to art again. I went to ArtCenter and this is a traditional Bauhaus art and design education where we have a shop.

This is something that we see in most schools and kind of the ACAD union here in the states, at least. But that, of course, building things like a box or sculpture that was not as accessible to me. And he actually proposed that I create a series of paintings that would capture the quality of the mark that only I could make.

So I started to use my toes to make marks with charcoal. I started to use paint thinking about how I can make marks with my elbow. Again, I'm thinking back, that moment was really big for me because it showed me again, and it's not this kind of glossy, there's all, the opportunity of disability, quote unquote, but it was the specificity of disability through the mark. It showed me that my body didn't necessarily have to make the calligraphic marks that formed my arts and our education. They could make these really grotesque, bold in some ways violent marks intentional

marks, non-conventional marks that argued with those marks. And as an aesthetic system, that could be something that, for me at that point could feel uniquely mine.

So I'm going back to this dialectic, where my body was a problem for me or something to be overcomed through most of my art career, until something like, the creative brief and this kind of unruly mark-making assignment in this class allowed my body to be a catalyst for difference in a positive way.

And that mark made my body okay to me and interesting to me at that point. Reopened the question of, what is the problem, right? I then started to think about how, cause I use the mouse on my computer with my toes.

I performed graphics with my toes and my mouth, rather than hands. From that point, I really felt like my means of making entered this really interesting, dialectic where, my, my body is revealed by the making and the making is revealed by my body. And that relationship was producing very different things than my peers. And why I labor a little bit to talk about this is because that politic informs how I think about access.

[00:13:08] **Matt May:** Yeah, I think that's a good jumping off point to the concept of both bodymind and the idea of embodied learning, right?

I think the perception, especially if you didn't have any disabilities to contemplate that impeded your access to either traditional art supplies or technology, the software for it, that you just thought that it was a skill building exercise where you gathered all the same things that everybody else had, and then you were done, right? And then you were a designer.

And here you are, basically you're almost a materials designer before. You're a graphic designer because you have this starting point where you need to meet the materials where they're at, and then this new evolution where you're making the materials do what your body wants it to do instead of what matches the design that's on the screen.

[00:14:03] **Joshua Halstead:** Totally. Yep.

[00:14:04] **Matt May:** Can you talk about embodied learning? I know there's an exercise in the book for this, but just the idea of thinking of your body as one of the tools that you're using. Just even for me, I was like, wait, what? Oh, yeah. That is definitely a thing.

[00:14:17] **Joshua Halstead:** Yeah. Why I talked about embodied learning in the book, and wrote a subsequent article on AIGA's design educator community titled "Making space for disabled bodyminds in design pedagogy" and I coauthored that with, Emeline Brulé. I think it's important because it situates the question of disability within the body.

And it is stubborn in not allowing the concept of disability. If we really integrate the bodymind in design, a disability cannot be an abstract concept that can be defined by anyone else, be it a medical establishment or a design house. If we're bringing in the body of designers into the design process, then they have to unpick the abstractions and the concepts with their own body. And my hope is that they can draw and redraw their own lines, or just get rid of the lines between, non-disabled or disabled in some way.

That's not the kind of invisibilize or kind of universalize the experience of disability. But it was specifically to open up the question more broadly cause otherwise, we have this abstract thing over here called disability, and this is how we designed for it. But the whole kind of disability politic that at the point of writing it, that I was really steeped in, it was this idea of like noticing bodies. But if my design critique or design direction was all about, here, look at these concepts or these guidelines or these ideas they didn't, there was a negative discontinuity in the politics that I was pushing, quote unquote, and the methodologies that I was pushing.

So the idea is simply that our bodies are always a medium through which we design. And those bodies don't have universally positive or negative experiences in the world. But if we invite the body into just our experience of the world, right? If we're going to invite this idea of phenomenology into design canon, then it can really open up the experiences of friction and attention and ease for all of the designers that can then be, not new canon, but an additional canon to rubrics like universal design.

So one of the primary reasons there were the two primary reasons, right?

Number one is that it opens up the question of the body for designers to really grapple with the experiences of ease and friction. Which I think is paramount to discussions on disability. The second though, because that can move us away from disability and in some kind of way, universalize and say, quote, unquote, everyone is disabled in some way.

And that's not something that I wanted to do. The second reason why body-mind is important is because a disabled people experience ableism, right? Not just barriers but discourses framing, our lives is lesser. And this is what we write in this. J article when designers describe usability tweaks as enabling wellbeing or positive, self-image, they're actually making this assertion between body and mind and what I wanted to do and why I thought it's important to have this discussion of mind is because I don't want us to make these logical leaps from ramps to wellbeing, or from screener to accessible websites to excellent, and thriving, digital experiences. I wanted to open up not just the physical, but the psychological and the social aspects of design that are already embedded in it, but seemed to have been left out of the discussion around disability.

[00:18:00] **Matt May:** I think that's actually a good segue for us to get into the second segment where we start talking about all of the framing around inclusive design and universal design. So we're going to take a short break and we'll be right back with Joshua Halstead.

InEx is a major research project by me, Matt May, as part of the master of design degree program at OCAD University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Episodes and transcripts of this podcast can be found at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. Follow InEx on Twitter at @inexpodcast.

And we're back with Joshua Halstead. And from the last segment, I think it's a good time for us to start talking about inclusive design. And I want to talk about how you see it in the world, how it's practiced, and we'll get to the juxtaposition between that and universal design. But really, I want to see how it's perceived and practiced, and what your critique is of it.

[00:18:58] **Joshua Halstead:** Great. So yeah, it's, this is the question, right? What's, what do we think about this thing called an inclusive design? On the positive, I think it's an important development in the history of design. I think it has connections to political organizing to activism in general to a broader social sensibility.

It's not exclusive to design. I think it's kind of part of a broader, I'll say the word awakening, that in general we are asking questions like, and putting these questions on the decision-making table of who's being left out.

So in terms of its origins, at least the thread that I find most generative is thinking about it in relation to the larger movement toward participatory design and its offshoot of co-design and seeing that specifically situated in labor politics and making sure that workers in Europe where it began and really took hold, had control over their working conditions, or had at least some participation in their working conditions, specifically in relation to the design of the technologies that they used on a daily basis.

And participatory action research, which came out of that has a commitment to not just to designing things co-constituively, but also making sure that the things that we make actually make a difference to the folks who have been traditionally marginalized. And I see resonances of this historical discourse and contemporary discourse in the discourse of inclusive design.

So it's its root system that gives me some hope. Now just like everything is like the game of telephone, you say one thing and maybe a hundred people down that line it completely changes.

[00:20:45] **Matt May:** This is something that I've talked about with, I think all of my guests, that there's a defining term.

And I'll read what the Inclusive Design Research Centre's definition of this is. And then there's the colloquial standard, which is, inclusive design is anything that I can think of that's inclusive and design. It doesn't have any of the methodological constraints to it. It's just the kind of thing that you would see in a Buzzfeed, for example.

So I'm going to read the definition from the IDRC just as the starting point for this. And I want to just tease out how well you think this is established in people's minds.

"Inclusive design is designed that is inclusive of the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age, and other forms of human difference."

What are your opinions of that and how do you see that compared to what as touted as an inclusive design?

[00:21:39] **Joshua Halstead:** Yeah. I see both and maybe I take a little bit of issue with the direction of the definition, but moving from this idea of telephone, and building on what you said, it feels like, yeah, there's this stitching together of putting one's toe in inclusion and then continuing with all the mainstream practices of design and then calling it inclusive plus design, I guess we're doing inclusive design.

And that, that could mean anything from, doing research that you might not typically do or asking your neighbor who represents a pocket of diversity. Like taking a week to go to a neighborhood or a country that you're not familiar with and then coming back and doing, the traditional design process and calling it inclusive.

I see this kind of shallow distortion of what it means. I see inclusive design in that kind of context becoming a genre, and then just romance or a tragedy, or movie. We know what's happening in the Hallmark movie, we know that love will prevail, we know the beginning of the middle and the end.

And I think that is the beginning of the danger point for any ideology, but inclusive design as an ideology when it becomes a genre that has particularities that characterize it and differentiate it from different design discourses. So about, at the same time I do see folks that are really intentionally making moves to talk to folks who have not just talked to, but involve folks who are traditionally not involved in design in the design process.

I think, okay. Someone who has done that. Sasha Costanza-Chock 's idea of design justice addresses that. Having spoken to some folks at Adobe, yourself included. I know that the research that's happening kinda starts to move in this direction in many aspects that we believe you did the, is it XD that became a voice...

[00:23:22] **Matt May:** Voice control was in XD, yeah.

[00:23:24] **Joshua Halstead:** Right. It's easy to be, an armchair critic, how do you get to XD and voice control without doing something like inclusive design is just, I don't understand how that would happen. So I think that there are, examples of this idea of inclusion happening in design.

The two critiques that I have is inclusive design's connection to the idea of equality. And then to this kind of a broad brush approach, which I think is evident in the definition, the definition is, we're committed to, first and foremost it's highly committed to an identitarian logic that says that we're going to include this group and this group and this group and this group and this group and this group and this group.

And as long as we include them, the others, quote unquote then design can be and will be by definition inclusive. It makes no kind of claim about what types of knowledges, what type of material politics are involved in inclusive design. It just says, as long as we are cohesive with an identitarian politics and put everyone in the bag, so to speak, then the output will be quote unquote inclusive.

And that to me is really convenient, because it can be in any context. It can be practiced and a corporation like it can be practiced. And I would say, political resistance group. So there's this abstraction that I think is really convenience and part of, why it's so well adopted.

[00:24:45] **Matt May:** Actually, if I can just talk about the first one first. Actually Jutta and I talked about this in her interview for the same podcast, and she actually talks about not wanting there to be a definition that's agreed upon for inclusive design, in that the surface area can't be covered by labels. It also leaves out the idea of the intersection between different identities, especially marginalized identities, and about what that idea of the solution is. And she wants to leave that open.

I think that the reason for the definition is only so that there are touch points that people can describe. And it's kind of like if you were in Rome and you were to describe the sun rising, you have to talk about Apollo carrying the chariot through the sky, you have to have the framing that people can understand for it, in order to start teasing out what actually is beyond the phenomenology of it. So I think it's a difficult one because you want to expand the lens of this beyond, like for accessibility, from screen readers to gross and fine motor disabilities to cognitive

and emotional disabilities. Just making sure that people are seeing really the full breadth of what needs to happen there.

But ultimately those labels do have to fall by the wayside in the actual practice.

[00:26:03] **Joshua Halstead:** Yeah. Yeah. Just to draw that out, and through a recent experience. My biggest complication currently with inclusive design is that it doesn't have a politics for making decisions. And I appreciate the, the ambition to not have a definition, but, respectfully that means that anyone can define it. And it can be redefined, which I guess is part of, I think, this kind of agency and definition is part of the solution, but it also conveniently removes the bedrock of politics and oppression from the idea of inclusive design.

What happens when you put people together in a room and a designer could tell you this, any researcher can tell you this is that they don't disagree with that. The don't agree all the time. Current conversations and participatory action research go beyond just putting people within a room, but also having a very deliberate commitment to anti-oppression work.

So are we committed to anti-racism, antisemitism? What are we committed to? An example of to gonna show in the concrete, how does this work? I'm currently doing a consulting project for an organization that's redesigning landscaping and it's a university and there are on one side, the leadership of the university wants to think about this space as a community driven space, a place where the community can come in. Then you interview the students, and the students talk about how they've experienced threats. Specifically, women students have experienced threats of sexual violence by community members in the space. And then you also have community members saying that they've been left out of the space and wanting to be invited in, wanting places like commons, like gallery spaces or yard spaces, et cetera.

If we're just talking about all of the people involved, where we have, people involved, but we also have, specific and messy disagreements. What rubric, when we have, the ambition to make an anti-racist space to make a space with the politics of let's say transformative justice, where we have friction and disagreements.

If we politely excuse ourselves from the ethical questions of making decisions and having a commitment to a certain politics, then those decisions, I think more times than not, are going to go in the way of the dominant powers, folks who have power, folks who have money, folks who are funding the projects, folks who speak up in the meetings, right?

So if we don't have a rubric for politics, I don't see it being any different from conventional design practices.

[00:28:45] **Matt May:** Yeah. And I think that a part of this is just that a lot of this has to do with deciding who gets to participate. And having worked in an environment that was consensus based that I worked for the World Wide Web Consortium, all of the standards for the web have to get the consensus of hundreds of different organizations in order to be published.

That's hard. It's just, it's a difficult thing to accomplish with people. Deciding who decides is itself a political act that also itself needs to be surveyed. There needs to be consent of the governed, as it were. And I think that one of the things that inclusive design has in this process is establishing people as full stakeholders that weren't considered that before. Or weren't considered until parts of the process had already been done to the extent that nothing really could be done to extend an existing artifact to them.

They needed to be thought of, brought in, given a platform and some level of participation and power in the system that they didn't have before. So I think that it's a little mushy in there because if you came in with, here's a checklist, this is how you're going to establish this kind of organization, that you then have and equality problem over here. You're thinking about the inclusivity of it at that political decision-making process that ordinarily inclusive design, I think integrates with once there is that unanimity, that agreement that we're going to work this way.

[00:30:20] **Joshua Halstead:** Yeah. Yeah, totally. If you were to get your family or your friend group or your whatever kind of social group you might belong to. Maybe more than five people, and you were trying to decide where you were going to go for that, there's going to be disagreements, right? So there are ways that you navigate that thing. So it gets exponentially more complicated when you have class divides and other socioeconomic kind of divides.

Specifically also, which is interesting to me, which gets back to the beginning is the material divides. So we can say that we have a consensus oriented space, but are we making decisions on Zoom, where the people who speak up get to help and sway the decision? Before the pandemic, when I was in design spaces, we made decisions in a consensus oriented space, so to speak, but those decisions were also made through post-it notes and Sharpies, a material interface that I had trouble interacting with fluently, quick enough to influence a decision. So if we're doing a brainstorming session. The issue of consensus and mediation, in a material and social world, worlds, quote unquote is super complex, and it gets into the idea of, should we or shouldn't we standardize inclusive design?

I would say no also, but I don't think it's, an invitation to just, say make your own definition.

[00:31:36] **Matt May:** Yeah. And what occurs to me is that over the course of my instruction at OCAD, and over the course of my career, I've realized that inclusive design itself is just a tool. The question is, what are you using this tool for?

And that really changes the equation. When you start thinking about this as a career track or somebody that wants to be an inclusive designer, that constrains who it is that you're going to be able to work with. Because you can't be the one person who's doing justice work in a fundamentally unjust organization, right? There's only so much that you can show someone without having the organizational buy-in for whatever kind of organization it is to do actual, meaningful work, to alter the processes and the artifacts that they create. That just means that we don't get to have a job anywhere we want. We have to actually evaluate what it is that we are doing.

Because if we're only doing these superficial acts and calling it inclusive design, then that's not what it is that we're getting into. And so I've described this as, inclusive design is the what, then what's the why? I've asked this of other people that have gone through this program. What's the why?

And for me, that's equity. The discussion is we have to understand that inequity is riven through everything that we've done up to this point. And if design as a discipline, isn't recognizing that and countering it, at least drawing a line as far as what it is that they consider to be inequities of

the past and equity that they want to establish in the future, then they can just keep learning Photoshop in school, and being technicians. But there has to be someone in here that says we have to draw an ethical line for what it is that we are doing and not doing, and who we're going to listen to, who we're going to have as a part of our organization, who are going to listen to externally.

And that to me, I think is where that inclusive design methodology comes into practice, where you start talking about co-design, participatory action research, but also engaging with the HR department, the employee experience organization, everybody that is involved in creating spaces for people to participate equitably.

And that I think is where the inclusive design touches kind of everything. So I think that there's a lot to that, but I wanted to just get your thoughts on that or about the concept of equity as people are thinking about it, how would you frame or reframe it to them if you were talking about what equity work entails?

[00:34:24] **Joshua Halstead:** Yeah. That's, it's, I was thinking, maybe I'll get equity through this, but as you were talking, and I was also thinking about my experience, where your, a recent experience in consulting on making an accessible based website, one where we're specifically trying to push beyond universal design.

I would say the conditions of that project is, we want to be creative and move beyond standards. Which is a really great condition to be working on. I think you're right, what's the common thread in most of this? It's equity, and I would also add to that, power.

And I think as a thing in the world, inclusive design, at least what I've gathered from it, lacks a substantive kind of reckoning and critique of power. What is power? What are the forms of power that we're thinking about? I think we can't get to equity before we think about and start to at least formulate some very concrete ideas of what power is and how it designers are or aren't in some ways involved in it.

What inclusive design at its best creates, is more equitable experiences. When we're thinking about multimodal representation. So we're translating images in text for screen readers. If we are

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thinking about how one tabs through a website, not just clicks through it. If we're maybe explaining Shannon Finnegan does on Alt Text as P oetry website, that we're doing this kind of a lighthearted comedic and really interesting description of the website, at its best, it can really redefine what design does and our experience of it.

Inclusive design at its worst, for me, can be an excuse to bypass and not to grapple with the power that's involved in the decision-making process. No matter what you're doing in terms of inclusion, access, there are always decisions that need to be made.

In this art website, we are looking at archival documents, not just text but drawings and we're asking questions, which get translated, how do they get translated, which don't get translated. How has that related to the money that we have? How is that related to the project timeline? How does that relate to our partners?

We could say it's inclusive design, and sometimes it means we're dealing with power. But really, we make decisions and we do things and we don't do things. Every single time that we do something, we don't do something. Also some things that we do present barriers and conflicts for other people.

So power is inherently in this. Instead of defining equity, I really hope for inclusive design to have a deeper engagement with the discussion of power. And again, this is specific to me. Just having been, thinking about it, writing about it, participating in it.

And so many times the question that's posed to me is what ought we do? What should we do? You're the inclusive design person. You're the universal design person. You're the ADA person, just tell me what I have to do. And in that question is please take the power. Or at least my recognizing that I actually have agency in this process away from me, because I don't want to make the wrong decision.

So please take the power away from me please.

[00:37:28] **Matt May:** Or also, what is the minimum that I need to do to get you out of my hair.

[00:37:32] **Joshua Halstead:** Totally.

[00:37:33] **Matt May:** That can be the actual subtext of a lot of these discussions. When you look at companies that talk about your liability under ADA, there are layers of abstraction to take that away from the agency of the actual people that the ADA was meant to work for.

And the same thing with civil rights legislation of all kinds, that there are decisions that need to be made that do not directly economically improve a given person's situation. And therefore they want to just figure out, how can I negotiate down to something bite-sized, that I can say that I'm being inclusive. And that's something that I think people need to be really wary of when they are bringing this into the conversation, because they can really be led astray by people who *really truly* want to help.

But, and then, and that's the but, you get the but, and then you realize that this is all just for show and that the work that you're doing is only ever going to be like a tiny little subsection of a subsection of something, but everything else is full steam ahead. Don't care about any of the inclusivity aspects of what we're doing.

[00:38:40] **Joshua Halstead:** What I fear is that inclusive design, just becomes, this thing that's mired with good intentions. Ivan Illich talks about let's do a way with good intentions, to hell with good intentions.

We have to get to brass tacks. This is something that we've grappled with in design for a very long time. What's good is that we're having conversations about it. Why? Because we've had conversations about it. It's not necessarily new knowledge. But the challenge, I think, is to do something about what we've talked about and what we've decided as a design, how does it connect constituencies, and not just pose the questions ahistorically.

[00:39:16] **Matt May:** This is a good point to take a break. So we will be right back with Joshua Halstead.

This is the final episode of InEx. Or maybe this season of InEx? If you've made it this far, I want to know what you think. My email is mattmay@gmail.com. That's M-A-T-T-M-A-Y, at Gmail. Should I keep this going? Who do you want to hear from? I'd really appreciate the feedback. Thanks.

And we're back. And I wanted to ask a question that I usually ask earlier about this. So I'm going to backtrack and go back to your book. And I want to go to the subtitle of this, which is "a feminist, inclusive, anti-racist, nonbinary field guide for graphic designers." Lots of identities tied up in that discussion. We have to realize as inclusive designers that we can't speak for, that we don't necessarily represent individually every one identity that's been marginalized.

So the discussion of inclusivity in the context of an inclusive designer's job is not to learn and perfect understanding of what everyone else's lived experience is. It is to bring that lived experience directly into the conversation. And one of the pieces that we need to understand about that is there are things that I can do as a self advocate.

My lived experience is the one that's being that this being brought to the fore, but simply being a self advocate, doesn't make you an inclusive designer. It makes you a participant with a specific vested interest in this, that then you could use your power to exclude other people. And so there's this other aspect of collaboration or allyship or whatever you want to call it that you understand and have collegial relationships with people from other identities and are helping to bring them into that conversation rather than trying to speak for them.

Even within the disability community, that idea of being an advocate comes with limitations of what matters to me and my lived experience versus someone who is deaf, someone who's hard of hearing you name it. How do you find your limits and how do you make sure that you're not talking over someone when you're ostensibly there to expose people to that experience?

[00:41:31] **Joshua Halstead:** Yeah. To start, something that's sometimes named, sometimes not in this idea of inclusive design is this feminist politic, which actually started maybe before this but specifically, legibly, in Marxist politics of labor, this idea of situated knowledge, right?

Marx says workers have a unique view of capitalism in such a way that they can make a difference within it. Overthrow it, in Marx's idea. But specifically, they know capitalism different from the

rulers or the masters quote unquote, the bourgeois. This kind of feminist concept of a situated knowledge is specifically saying, that women, again, generally, have a specific relationship with, history, or his hyphen story, read the world is created through kind of the domination and for the domination of men, right?

This idea of situated knowledge, that based on our position in the society, we uniquely know society intimately. And there are things that we get to know a specific so in, in this kind of idea of design our folks with disability, it's not just that we are committed to making things that work for them, but the inclusion of disabled people in the design process is assuming this idea of situated knowledge, that different disabilities manifest, not just physically, but epistemically, right? They manifest in such a way that they give our participants a unique experience and knowledge of the world of design that is accessible to them, but importantly, is inaccessible to people that don't have that certain lived experience, a certain kind of social projection or whatever. So I think that's important because it's saying that, and the politics that I at least have come into with inclusive design is drawing on that, saying that everyone has a kind of situated specific but not universal, a partial knowledge of what's happening.

So how do we grapple with this idea of advocacy? One, I think is understanding that, you have a perspective that is unique to you. That is important, right? It's also mediated, socially and materially, but we don't have to get into that.

Just from the point of, your input is unique to you and important and says something about the things that you come into contact with design is one of them at the same time, there's not a universal story. In, in the kind of universe in the inclusive design conception of knowledge, right?

We're not saying that there is a universal knowledge that there's an essential knowledge. We're saying specifically they're situated in partial knowledges. Therefore the equation of equity means that we include a collective, but specifically a collective of individuals, and individual partial, mosaic type ways of stitching together, the conception of the world, the problems that we're solving as designers, et cetera.

So what is the job of the inclusive designer? It moves from the translator to the facilitator, right? I'm not collectivizing and synthesizing all of this and creating my own world view though, that

happens a lot more so we're facilitating and elevating perspectives that are lost, or devalued or repressed or et cetera. Important to note, I'd say, is understanding that, this facilitation is not liberation. The problem that we get into there is, a designer dropping into the community and then assuming that folks haven't or can't facilitate themselves.

So I think again, like here, we have an issue of kind of understanding and thinking about facilitation. It's actually a critic that was launched against Sasha Costanza-Chock, in an introduction of design justice, this kind of oh, designer as facilitator as likened with justice. We want to be careful about facilitation. But how do we advocate for others? I think you can always do your own learning, but also know that you're learning in your interpretation of what's happening is through the lens of your lived experience. So we have to get to this kind of facilitated way of thinking about design and that's why I'm so concerned with decisions because in this politics we're going to make decisions.

Inclusive design is not a politics of synthesis, right? We're not saying that there's a universal. Though in practice, we make reports that synthesize different opinions. And it's usually the activity of one, two, three people maybe, but yeah.

[00:45:53] **Matt May:** And I describe that as it's stochastic learning, right? You are gathering random data points. And one of the issues in inclusive design is to make sure that we are not representing that as the totality of the scene. It's really just to point out in a lot of cases, especially early on, as you're introducing this to people, how deep the rabbit hole goes, how wide the span of lived experiences is.

Because we were so focused on that center of the bell curve, top of the long tail audience. That is what we are supposed to work for. Get the low hanging fruit, right? That whole, like all of that language about excluding people, except the ones that are the most profitable. And so I think a lot of what happens in inclusive design is, you start out and you have so little data from the conversation that you are having with people that synthesizing it with the conventional wisdom of years of a product's development is dissonant. That somebody is now saying I'm left out of this. And it almost requires that discussion of power to come into the conversation, because you need to establish that this is something that we continue to find out more information about, and we

get it from the people who have the most information, which is the group of people that have not participated in this work at all up to that point.

And that's the difference, the inclusive design versus universal design idea of one size fits all versus one size fits one. That we are gathering information about one specific lived experience, perhaps even just within the domain of the thing that we are, that we're trying to create.

Then we can come back to this discussion of power here, because I think that designers need to understand how to conduct research. Not that they necessarily need to go and get their PhD in research, but that they need to understand what it is that they're getting when they have a dialogue with users.

And there's this idea of design thinking, which I think I've trashed in every one of these episodes so far, but that the designer is the center of the universe here, that they are the one that is the interpreter. The one that has the power in the situation. And one of the areas that inclusive design actually really gets deeply into the power dynamic, is in how participation occurs. As the researcher, as the facilitator of this, how far afield do your participants go? Do they completely redesign your product? There are ways that you can give almost all of your power to people that are participating in this. And we can get into a much more community based solution to something that includes not just how they participate, and we just give them all Starbucks gift cards, but how they profit, how they gain actual material equity in the work that's produced. I think that's another area that inclusive design doesn't provide a solution to, but it at least gives a means to start charting out that direction of how do we make sure that everybody is getting more out of this and they're putting in.

[00:49:01] **Joshua Halstead:** Yeah, completely. It's I agree with you that the clarion call is not to have all designers get a PhD in research. I do think that basic research, fundamental research principles, ethical principles are necessary. Just because we aren't doing human subject research.

As a teacher, far into my students' career, I I'm both excited and frightened when I'm, the first one to introduce the Belmont report to them. And knowing, that we don't have IRBs in corporations, we have different metrics, right?

Research methodology is, at least in undergraduate education, something that is not an emphasis. And I think that needs to be radically transformed. Right now, we're saying, we need to shift from, where we are now and designer as the center of the world, à la design thinking to this kind of justice oriented designer as facilitator, as researcher, as methodologist idea.

But there's a really nice, pointed claim that can elevate people professionally, academically, and by saying it put them in a genre of thinkers. Like this idea of justice as a brand. The methodologies aren't are there at least more, more widespread supporting the claim, supporting the call.

So I do think that, fundamental principles of human subject research how to conduct an ethical interview. What questions should you ask? What might be problematic? What is it, what is the Tuskegee study? What can inclusive designers learn from that? If we're saying that designers are moving from, this idea of our material skillfulness and we're hitting the future of design, aggressively so, in the methodology and research we need to be in conversation with researchers. Frankly.

[00:50:54] **Matt May:** That's one thing that I've learned over the last few years, definitely that researchers have a significant role in this. The ethics part of it is something that is strong with researchers. And actually, because I'm going to school in Canada, Canadians have the Tri-Council Policy Statement, which is a research ethics guidebook that whether it's. Design researchers or medical researchers, anybody that's in the field of researching humans need to understand the consequences of their actions in relation to researching any given population.

That's the thing that if I were to describe to people, this is what designers should do. There's always that discussion. This is what a designer is. This is what a designer does. I think that the discussion of the responsibilities to people need to take the front seat.

Not that the designer needs to master this kind of artwork, this art form, this kind of technology, how to manage an organization and how to work with engineers. That all should take a back seat to, how does your work impact humanity writ large? And how does your work, situated where you are, impact the lived experiences and the human rights of other people?

[00:52:20] **Joshua Halstead:** Completely. Going back to this idea of embodied learning, like why was that so important to me as a touchstone in a book like Extra Bold or on a forum like AIGA? It's because it does what I think is a very necessary first step into this designer as a researcher paradigm, which is it situates the designer, right? It situates them in their own lived experience. It creates a way in which, you know, through their body and reflection, that they can understand how design has impacted their humanity personally, right? How their interpretation of the effects, the design that they have done historically, that they want to do to create this kind of situated conversation with their immediate environment, no matter where they are.

It does what I think the, most of these kind of liberatory or revolutionary, or participatory methods are asking first and foremost, is to situate yourself, right? We situate ourselves in terms of our identities or, categories or whatever, that's another conversation.

I think it's useful in the sense of getting back to this idea of situated knowledge, which is part of the politics of inclusive design, whether it's stated or not. The first step, is making research accessible. We have to politicize our experiences, specifically with design, what works, what doesn't work, what's happening with your body? How has it involved in design? How's it been shaped by design? These are questions that need to be asked.

[00:53:45] **Matt May:** This just connects to, everything connects to Buddhism for me because I have studied Buddhism, the idea of it's not a universal truth if you can't observe it yourself. You only have one perspective on all of this. And when we try to genericize anything else, we lose that. We have to understand our positionality with respect to other people in order for us to be designers, because if we're not, then we're just designing for ourselves.

[00:54:13] **Joshua Halstead:** Totally. To connect that to a lecture that I just did a couple of weeks ago in class, on Kant's, what is enlightenment with my students and why I did that is not to put a stake in the ground and what enlightenment is, quote unquote. But because what is not enlightenment to Kant, is people creating a dependent relationship on prescriptions for life as a substitute of reasoning, right? So he says, there's this kind of issue with people exporting their critical reasoning or thinking solely to books, right? So if there's a problem to be solved, I need to read a book and then the book will tell me what to do, and then I know what to do.

There's a problem with people exteriorizing their morality to moral teachers. There's a problem with people exporting personal wellbeing to, to him, doctors. I would just say, to Instagram today, there's a problem with us, doing these things.

And I see a similar thing happening, writ large in design, and this is inclusive design and its dangerous zone, when we export our kind of moral reasoning or our critical thinking to a framework. As oh, inclusive design means that I'm a good designer.

And then there's pick whatever flavor of inclusive design you want, and that it lacks that reflexivity of lived experience like you're talking about.

[00:55:27] **Matt May:** I think that one of the problems of defining this is that. It's inexpressible. Any time that you take this and try to serialize it into a number of words, you're going to leave people out of this.

And so depending just on the framing for the entire worldview is folly, right? We have to get our foot in the door so that we can bring out all of the diversity that we're actually talking about in that conversation. So I think that ends up being one of the big challenges. How do you actually get that information into people's heads and allow them to be troubled by it?

There's a lot of troubling stuff that you're going to find out that challenges the way that you have conducted design in the past. And it's really just a way to get started down that road.

I wanted to move to what I call wishes, wants hopes and dreams. What are the things that you want the listeners of this podcast or practitioners of design to know? What do you wish for the design as a field? Who do you think is doing good work? What do you see in the future?

[00:56:31] **Joshua Halstead:** It's funny that you ask this because I've just, I've been reflecting. Of course. I always kinda reflect on this big question, but I feel like I actually have a nice play on design faux pas.

And I think what I'm really hoping for inclusive design in general to do, is to do design for design's sake. I feel like this often, that was like the worst of the worst critiques that I could get in

undergraduate education, oh, you're just doing design for design's sake, you're just doing, pretty typography, the trendy colors, you're just doing, ugh, like this delicious design that no one gives a crap about. And that's valid.

The power that I specifically, and I think that everyone that you talk to, I know that they're going to have their own trajectory and vision for inclusive design. What I think is really exciting for me specifically, and, in conversation of others who've helped me think about this is inclusive design's power or disability oriented design or maybe something, critical access studies. If you're talking to Aimi Hamraie, is the ability that inclusive design has to do design for design's sake in such a way that inclusive design can reopen closed questions that design has.

One of those closed discussions is the conversation of aesthetics. Another closed question is the question of the purpose or the process of design. What I mean by aesthetics is, what are the dominant aesthetic forms that mediate the practice of design? A poster means that we're putting a big image on a piece of paper. Or a homepage means that it's going to be a website, this kind of different way of access making, where you're interpreting the image with text or you're creating an altogether new digital experience, this reopens the question of form, which I think reopens the question of participation and creates a critical praxis within design in general, and moving between this critique and practices, which I think is interesting.

The question of design itself is, what's the purpose of design? One of the most elegant ways I've seen this questioned was through design pedagogy, through a class that Liz Jackson and Alex Haagaard taught, I believe last year at SVA or the students were graded or assessed.

I don't know that they're with the particularities of how they were valued but knowing both of them, I'm sure there was this really nice way of doing it that'd be counter hegemonic. But what I loved is that the final assessment was not the output of design. But students were measured in some way, shape or form based on their capacity to change directions and to have an unfinished piece of design. So much of the time, this kind of urgency of, oh, we have to include every single person right now is because the design question is being closed in six months. We are creating a product and it's going to hit the market and then the question's going to be closed. So why is everyone in a frenzy to get everyone involved right now?

Why do people get left out? Is because we have a closed question in six months, and all of the politics involved means that people are going to be left out. And we're punting to this closed form of design as outcome, design as science, design as design thinking, right? Inclusive design can reopen that question in design, this idea of the closed question, access as critique, access as question, access as open-ended making, where things can be made and remade and questioned, and people can be involved.

If we're really talking about inclusivity, if we're really talking about participation or transformation or liberation or justice or equity, the big things that we seek to do, I think inclusive design at its best can be design for design's sake, as an inversion, where we're questioning what's been closed over decades.

[01:00:18] **Matt May:** Last question for you. Who do you think is doing good work? Who do you think people should be paying attention to here?

[01:00:24] **Joshua Halstead:** Oh yeah. So many people I would say and this is when, I'll tell, just say people who I've been particularly moved by recently. Sara Hendren and Sara Hendren's work in her book, but just as an educator also, just as a person who's putting out content often. Kevin Gotkin, again, someone who's putting out content often, thinking about many things, but media as one. Aimi Hamraie and the Critical Design Lab. Transparently, I'm part of the design lab. So that's a bias thing. Liz Jackson, Alex Haagaard, Alice Wong. Most people know Alice as this like powerhouse influencer. And that's true, but I remember my first conversation with Alice, talking about advocacy, Alice as a human, I think is really important. After I'm done, talking about the ills of the world that I wanted to talk to Alice about, Alice asked me what TV show I was watching. And brought that in intentionally and in a fairly short meeting.

Why that's important to me is because we're not going to complete it. We're not going to complete the work. Like there is no work to complete in my opinion, it's ongoing development, move back to the idea of dialectics, right? Not that I'm beholden to a Hegelian sense of history, but I think that, to say that we're going to make an inclusive world in a hundred years is a little bit pompous.

Which means that the work is not going to stop, and good work means that there's going to be more work, at least in my experience. If we can't ask about the TV shows that we're watching, if we can't have time to commune together and introduce pleasure into the design process, and have time to take a break, and then re-ask the questions, we can get lost in the daunting ask of inclusive design and universal design in the urgency of liberation. Rather than the practice of liberation, that's something that's ongoing. So you know, the folks that I am inspired by, and I could just sit here and list name after name, like most of the people you're talking to.

But they are the people who bring their humanity into into the work, whether that work be market-based or community-based or academic. They are the people who are collaborators and allies and mentors and don't blur, or don't stay within one category, but blur all the categories. That are partners, inspire me. And the people I talked about I see as partners whether we're currently talking to each other or we've talked to each other along the way.

[01:02:46] **Matt May:** Absolutely. So that's a great place to end it. So Joshua, thank you so much for participating in this project and I had a fantastic time as I always do talking with you, and look forward to maybe doing this in person someday.

[01:03:02] **Joshua Halstead:** Totally. Thank you, Matt.

[01:03:04] **Matt May:** Thanks.

That's our show. Show notes and transcripts for all InEx episodes are available at inex.show. That's I-N-E-X dot show. All episodes are released under Creative Commons Attribution, 4.0 International license. Thanks for listening.

Appendix H – Interview Intake Form

Hi,

We're talking soon! I promise this is the last long preparatory email. I just have a few questions to make sure that I'm representing you adequately, and that we cover as much as we can of what you want to share.

How should I address you? Please include honorifics and/or pronunciations as you see fit.

What are your pronouns? (Mine are he/him.)

I want to draw attention in my interviews to the importance of lived experience in this space. To help highlight this, I want to balance discussing the personal with the professional to the extent you feel comfortable.
With that in mind, how do you identify? You may be as expansive as you like here. (I'll go first. I'm a cisgender, heterosexual, middle-aged white American man. I identify as disabled/neurodivergent/an ADHDer. Anything there is fair game. I use identity-first language for myself, but I'll accept person-first.)

Are there any aspects of your personal identity that you *do* or *do not* want to discuss in the context of this interview?

Are there any other subjects that we *must* or *must not* discuss, or anything else I should be aware of in advance?

Do you have a land acknowledgment to make? If not, could you give me your rough location, or go to https://native-land.ca and let me know what it tells you? (Mine will recognize the Duwamish Tribe and related Coast Salish Peoples.)

What accessibility requirements do you have?

Thanks,
m

Appendix I – Multimedia Files

The following MP3 audio files, representing each of the episodes transcribed in Appendices A-G, are included in this MRP submission:

S1E1 Jutta Treviranus.mp3 (96kbps MP3 audio file)

> Episode 1: Interview with Jutta Treviranus, May 8, 2022

S1E2 Chancey Fleet.mp3 (96kbps MP3 audio file)

> Episode 2: Interview with Chancey Fleet, May 8, 2022

S1E3 Timothy Bardlavens.mp3 (96kbps MP3 audio file)

> Episode 3: Interview with Timothy Bardlavens, May 8, 2022

S1E4 Aimi Hamraie.mp3 (96kbps MP3 audio file)

> Episode 4: Interview with Aimi Hamraie, May 8, 2022

S1E5 Sadie Red Wing Part 1.mp3 (96kbps MP3 audio file)

> Episode 5: Interview with Sadie Red Wing Part 1, May 8, 2022

S1E6 Sadie Red Wing Part 2.mp3 (96kbps MP3 audio file)

> Episode 6: Interview with Sadie Red Wing Part 2, May 8, 2022

S1E7 Joshua Halstead.mp3 (96kbps MP3 audio file)

> Episode 7: Interview with Joshua Halstead, May 8, 2022