Justice Shorter:

Greetings, good people, and welcome back to Disability Inclusion: Required. I am your host, Justice Shorter. As a Black blind woman, folks have been describing a lot of images to me lately, such as scenes of increased federal and local officers on my side of town or people joining together in an attempt to protect each other's rights and lives. Access to this type of information is critical to the safety and dignity of people who are blind or those with the vision loss. So on today's episode, we're focused on the power of creative and poetic image descriptions because even when the picture is painful or uncomfortable, people with vision disabilities still deserve access to what is being shown, saved and shared to others.

We're joined today by M Leona Godin and Olivia Dreisinger. Leona is the 2025 through 2026 Jean Strauss Fellow at the NYPL Coleman Center for Scholars and Writers to continue her work on blindness and photography. She is the author of There Plant Eyes: A Personal and Cultural History of Blindness, and the founder of Aromatica Poetica, an arts and culture laboratory for the advancement of smell and taste. She creates multisensory performance journeys, exploring the rich potential of synesthesia and disability aesthetics. Her writing has appeared in the New York Times, Art News, O Magazine and others. Her work has received support from MacDowell, Yaddo and the Diamonstein-Spielvogel Fellowship.

Olivia Dreisinger is a disabled writer, scholar, filmmaker, and PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia. Her own fluctuating abilities dictate how she produces work, a process that regularly leads her to new and generative mediums. Her work often takes a

documentary approach. Her current projects are interested in the maternal experience and parenthood. What Kind of Mother is a mid-length documentary exploring her mother's suicide and her own desires to have children. Weaning is a commissioned art show for The New Gallery that explores her experience with post-weaning anxiety through photogrammetry-created images of Olivia and her child nursing. Let's get into it. Leona, Olivia, welcome, welcome to the show. We're so happy to have you. How are you all doing?

Leona Godin:

Great. Thank you so much for having me on the show, Justice. It's a pleasure.

Justice Shorter:

It's so good to hear your voice. Olivia, how are you dear?

Olivia Dreisinger:

Oh, I'm good too. Just a little tired being a toddler mom. [inaudible 00:03:19]. Toddler, it's a lot, but I'm doing good.

Justice Shorter:

Okay. All right. We're sending you all of our warmest of wishes, all of our strength and sincere hopes that you make it through each and every day. I know that they are just a burst of light and energy, and it

is a lot sometimes, but I would love for both of you to introduce yourselves by way of this question. Do you have a favorite poem that embodies who you are in life right now? What makes that piece reflective of your personal or professional story? I want to start that way and I'm going to ask Leona to get us kicked off here.

Leona Godin:

Hey there. Thank you so much. I love this question. I'm just going to do a quick self-description. I am a white woman with long brown hair and I am today wearing some groovy violet colored sunglasses. And so I got my PhD in English literature, but I took a severe left turn and I have not done sort of academic literature stuff in a long time. And so it was interesting for me to kind think about a poem sort of writ large. But I will say that a few years ago when I started thinking about image description, this word bubbled up from the interstices of my academic life, and that word was ekphrasis or ekphrastic poetry.

And so I've been thinking a lot about this. It's simply a poem that describes a work of arts and it's usually a visual work of art. So very oftentimes, it will be a poem that is describing a painting. And so I thought of this poem by William Carlos Williams, that is called Landscape with the Fall of Icarus. And it is about a painting of the same name by one of these Dutch masters called Bruegel. So I'm just going to read it because it's quite as many of William's poems are. It's quite brief. Is that okay if I go ahead and-

Justice Shorter:

Yeah, please. I love it.

Leona Godin:

Okay, awesome. All right. Okay. So "According to Brueghel when Icarus fell, it was spring. A farmer was plowing his field. The whole pageantry of the year was awake, tingling near the edge of the sea, concerned with itself sweating in the sun that melted the wings' wax. Unsignificantly off the coast, there was a splash quite unnoticed. This was Icarus drowning." And I love this poem because it's kind of got this dark humor that is describing a painting with dark humor, which is to say that in the foreground, and this would be sort of the art historical way of saying it, right, the foreground, there was a farmer plowing his fields when this great mythological event happens.

We all know about Icarus who was told by his father, Daedalus, don't fly too close to the sun. And of course, he does and his wings melt and he crashes into the sea. And so in this painting and in this poem, the splash is unsignificant, right? It is not noticed by anything. And so I love this for a few different reasons, but one is that if you were to give what is often thought of as an objective reading of a painting, you wouldn't get to use words like unsignificant, right, or unnoticed. And so, it gives us the sense of the painting in words. And in the end, what we're really excited about, I hope, talking about today, is the power of sensory translation. And maybe adding to that the aesthetics of access, which I hope we can talk about a little bit more as we move on.

Justice Shorter:

Oh, absolutely.

Leona Godin:

That we have this beautiful poem that is a reflection of the painting, that they are both artworks. And I'm done.

Justice Shorter:

Oh, now what a gorgeous way to get us started. And I'm so thrilled that you used a visual art and a poem that was connected to visual art to get us started because there's just so many gorgeous, amazing paintings in the world, and so many of them lack great descriptions.

Leona Godin:

Yes.

Justice Shorter:

And many of us with vision loss or with visual disabilities lack access to them. So I'm so thrilled that you got us started in that way and that yes, that is the whole point of today's conversation. And Olivia, I'm going to kick it over to you, a poem that really embodies where you are in life right now. What would that be?

Olivia Dreisinger:

Well, I wanted to say like Leona, I'm also an English, well, I haven't gotten my PhD yet. We'll see [inaudible 00:08:27]. But I would say I'm a bit more bumbling in my, like Leona is so theatrical. I love what you chose there, but I guess I should give an image description of myself as well. I'm a white woman with, what is my hair doing now? I haven't had a haircut since my baby and it's probably down to my shoulders now. And my baby is out with my dad, so I'm enjoying his house to myself right now. That's where I am in this space. And actually, my poem has to do with parenthood as well that I chose. And I would say even as an English person, I don't like poetry, but I found alt text fascinating, just inherently literary it is or should be or can be. And so, the poem that I chose is from another disabled writer, Amy Berkowitz, and it's also sort of a visual translation [inaudible 00:09:38] read you the note that she added for me to read it.

It's called Depression. It's an erasure of the postnatal depression scale, a ten-question survey handed to birthing parents on a clipboard at every doctor's visit in the months following birth. And so one of Amy's doctors provided her a laminated version of the survey and a dry erase pen so she can conveniently wipe away her depression to make space for the next patient's depression. So what she's done is kind of blacked out different words on this survey and [inaudible 00:10:16] have the poem. So it's called Depression and it reads, "Since you recently had a baby, we want to place a check mark on you. Today is a test. If something doesn't seem right, you

you no not please, have a funny side, a look-forward thing, have a self, most of the time, some of the time, have a good son. Yes, yes. Getting me well," quite well. So yeah, that's the one I chose. I liked it because it functions as both a very visual representation of parenthood and postnatal depression, and then also as sort of an alt text poem as well.

Justice Shorter:

Mm-hmm. I love it. I love it so much. And Leona, I'm going to bring you back in here because I actually want you to explain the concept of alt text as poetry. We've been talking about alt text a lot. And so, first for those who don't know, what is alt text and secondly, why should philanthropic folks shift their thinking towards more poetic image descriptions?

Leona Godin:

Oh, boy. Well, alt text is a description usually pretty short, that describes digital piece of some sort of image in the digital space insofar as it's usually embedded into the code behind the image, so that a lot of sighted people won't necessarily know that the alt text is there and it can be accessed using screen readers or Braille displays. The reason why it's useful to be short, and this gets at this concept of alt text as poetry, is because generally it's within the context of something else.

And I think that one thing to realize is that image description has a long and beautiful history, especially in art history, that image

descriptions are not just about disability-related access, right? It's also about understanding what is in a work of art, for example. So I guess what I would say is that alt text is a kind of image description and this concept that, I can't wait to hear it from Olivia, because she works with the people that came up with the idea of alt text is poetry, which I highly recommend you check out the website, alt-text-as-poetry.net.

But one of the things that has been really helpful for me to think about is that in the alt text context, what we are going for is something that is concise and expressive, and we look to poetry for a model for how to model a description that is concise and expressive. That is to say, we are not looking to describe everything that's in an image. We are not looking for, and this is going to continue to be, I think, a thread in our conversation. We're not looking necessarily for objectivity, which is almost really impossible because we are humans and our vision goes through our brains.

And so, when we are looking at an object, we are bringing to bear all the sort of affinities and biases that we have built up through our own personal experiences. So objectivity is not really what we're looking for. So this notion of concise and expressive means, what does this image mean to you? Why are you posting this on Facebook? Why are you posting this image on Instagram, right? What does it say and how does it say it, I guess, is what we're going for with Alt Text as Poetry.

Justice Shorter:

I love that so much because I am a blind person and people often ask me, "Hey, can you check this image for alt text and how much should I put in it and how much should I leave out, and should I mention the borders and the decorative elements or should I not?" So everybody has their own preferences for what is actually useful and what just becomes annoying and really long at the end of the day and held you up from getting the most important details, like perhaps when and where an event is if you're listening to an event flyer-

Leona Godin:

Yes.

Justice Shorter:

... or how to register for something. But of course you do also want to know if there's any images of the speakers or the venue where the space will be taking place. Those things are really important on something like an event flyer. But yes, the concise but expressive. I love that. I love drilling down on those two frames in particular. Olivia, I want to bring you in though because as Leona mentioned, you work very closely with the team who is behind Alt Text as Poetry, but you yourself are quite instrumental in Alt Text Selfies. Do you want to share a little bit about that?

Olivia Dreisinger:

Yeah, so Alt Text Selfies, Finnegan Shannon and Bojana Coklyat and I, I was inspired by their amazing work with Alt Text as Poetry. And then I thought, what's another kind of interesting genre, I guess, of alt text? And I thought, oh, the selfie.

Justice Shorter:

Yeah.

Olivia Dreisinger:

It's sort of photography, but then the alt text is describing your selfie and that becomes kind of sexy in a certain way as well, kind of translating your selfie into text. And I became, as a writer, very interested in that. And like Leona was saying, there's different kind of information people might want to convey, depending on the audience or where you're posting an image. And so with the selfies, we came up with different kind of groupings of things that it seemed like people were doing with their selfies, like describing movement, multisensory. Some of them had word economy, very short. Some of them were much longer, narrative. Some people want to describe animals in their selfies or objects, feelings, time travel.

Some people had birthday selfies. That's a kind of selfie in itself, gender play. It was really interesting to see what people thought was interesting to translate about themselves into the alt text or the image description. And just as what you were saying about sometimes you're trying to access the important information and people were describing the borders of the image and everything. I

think with what Alt Text as Poetry is trying to do and also Alt Text Selfies is sort of to show that it might take a certain kind of looking to practice or it's a writing practice, I would say, to translate images into text, like any kind of art form. And I'd like to think of it as an art form as well and that it's actually a very fun thing to practice.

Justice Shorter:

I agree. I totally agree with you. And listen, they say a good picture can stay in your mind for a lifetime, but I'm also curious about good image descriptions, alt text, how long that stays. So Olivia, I want to extend with you for just a moment. Can you give us a few great examples of creative image descriptions that have stuck with you over time, whether it were the selfies or Alt Text as Poetry or any number of projects that you've been involved with, but are there any good examples that have stuck with you?

Olivia Dreisinger:

Yeah, so when I was kind of practicing this kind of writing, I also noticed that in my disability community, a lot of my sick friends, they're making posts, but they might not have the mental capacity to write alt text, but they want to still commit themselves to accessibility so they would source out that task to other people. So I've had multiple friends who have joined in on as a volunteer image describers, and what I thought was also really cool was you'd see a post, you'd read the image description or alt text, and that person would be attributed as writing that piece, which I think was really

important. And just shows access is love and that kind of labor for access. So two examples that I wanted to read out loud was a similar writing experiment. So I got two people to describe the same image to sort of see what they came up with or what they thought was interesting, just so fascinating to see how-

Justice Shorter:

Sure.

Olivia Dreisinger:

... people's brains work. You know?

Justice Shorter:

Mm-hmm.

Olivia Dreisinger:

So the first person, my friend Alexander Box, she described the image in this way. In a moving vehicle, a white woman sits on the black leather interior seat wearing a puff vest and tracksuit, both the color black with white piping. They hold their cell phone in their hand while looking up at the camera lens. Perched beside the individual, there is a knockoff designer bag that is black faux leather with brown graphic detailing. On their face is a neutral expression, lip straight, head tilted and eyebrows relaxed. And then I got my

boyfriend to describe it to see what he came up with. And it's still got the same information, but it's just written totally differently.

So he wrote, "A young woman sits in the leftmost leather bench style back seats of a van or SUV. Her hair is blonde and tied up in the back and a pair of dark sunglasses rest on the top of her head. She's wearing a black Adidas tracksuit with a black puffy synthetic vest over top. She's looking at the camera with an unfocused but friendly and relaxed look. Her right hand rests on her lap holding a phone with her thumb poised to touch the screen. A Louis Vuitton bag rests on the middle seat to her." So for me, I guess the act of writing or the act of getting someone else to write, that's so captivating to me. So those are some image descriptions that just stuck with me because it's a process that I was working with someone too, that made it so captivating just to see how they write and they think, how they see.

Justice Shorter:

It almost makes you think about the age-old saying and beauty is in the eye of the beholder and as is the description, what information is deemed most important for people to include in a description or in alt text is based on who is doing it. And so I love that. Olivia, I also noticed there that the first person to do the description that you read aloud also mentioned race. And I just think that's so important because so often, I think race is left out of descriptions. Folks may say a lighter-skinned or a darker-skinned individual, which is entirely understandable when the race of the person is unknown. But if, in fact, the race of a person is known, it's really helpful to know that information, especially if everyone else has visual access to it. It

does indeed help. Leona, do you have any thoughts about that, including different details about a person such as race or gender, et cetera?

Leona Godin:

Yes, absolutely. I was just about to be like, "I want to say something."

Justice Shorter:

Yes.

Leona Godin:

So I mean, there's so many reasons why I think this is useful. I mean, as you say, it's something that sighted people have access to immediately. So one thing that I think is useful in terms of the self-description is that you have the possibility. A lot of people say, "Oh, I don't like this to self-describe at the top of meetings. It takes so much time." But it's an opportunity to say what's important to you, right? And to present yourself the way that you want to be presented. I think one person that talks about this so beautifully is Thomas Reid.

Justice Shorter:

Yes.

Leona Godin:

... who has a podcast about being a Black man who is now a blind man and navigating that territory. And one of the things that he talks about is how frustrated he is at the attempt to be quote "colorblind" when it comes to image descriptions in mainstream media and how this is speaking to a world that doesn't exist, that urge to be colorblind is not a world that we live in, right? And so, to ignore telling a blind person what race or what your best guess at a race, I think, is really a part of infantilizing blind people in terms of not giving them things that feel kind of touchy or sensitive or something.

And I think that also works for disability too, right? I write about photographs of blind people and it's interesting how people are afraid to name blindness or afraid to name milky eyes or something like that or afraid to name disability. And I think that this speaks to a larger concern about marginalizing through lack of conversation. And I think that image description kind of speaks to those larger timidities, shall we say, or fears of getting things wrong, which also leads me to say that there's no such thing as a correct image description.

Justice Shorter:

Yes.

Leona Godin:

And I think that a lot of times, keeps people from trying. This notion of objectivity keeps people from just trying, that we're all going to get things wrong in terms of other people's identities, just like we're all going to see different things in photographs and it's okay to be wrong, I think is maybe my takeaway from that.

Justice Shorter:

Yeah, I love that. And I'm so thrilled that you mentioned Thomas Reid. We love us some Thomas Reid over here.

Leona Godin:

Oh, yeah.

Justice Shorter:

That podcast that you mentioned is Reid My Mind.

Leona Godin:

Yes.

Justice Shorter:

And he is exceptional. Been working with him on several projects over the last few years. So that's, my gosh, major shoutouts to

Thomas Reid. If you do not know his work, please go out and find it. It is wonderful.

Leona Godin:

[inaudible 00:25:22].

Justice Shorter:

Leona, I want you to continue on here because you already started down this track and I just want you to keep on moving. You talk about the importance for philanthropic organizations to integrate more sensory experiences into their work, right? You talked about being able to describe things that make people a little bit uncomfortable with things that they're just unaware of, but I also want to look at this from a broader sensory perspective, which you have a lot of experience with.

Leona Godin:

Yes. I think that the importance of sort of sensory experiences, it comes down to the fact that we are sensory beings, right? I mean, we are not all eyes. Even if you have perfect vision, you're not all eyes. And I think that a lot of blind people have had this experience, Georgina Kleege, who writes beautifully about art access and image descriptions and things like that. Particularly, I'm thinking of a book called More than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art.

Many of us have had this experience where we go to a museum, we get to have one of these beautiful little touch tours and many sighted people, or sighted friend or companion says, "Wow, everybody around is looking very envious at you for getting to touch these objects." Right? Because we are all touch, we are all multisensory beings, right? I think that sometimes multisensory becomes this buzzword for trying to do things differently in a museum, but our ideas about what culture is and our hierarchies about things that are most important are hung in a museum and to be looked at from a certain distance. All those ideas are pretty modern and they remove the fact that we are humans who have all these different sensory organs.

And so, I think it's always useful to think about the fact that, we were talking about the aesthetics of access, but we also need to think about access to a broad audience that accepts humans as diverse sensory beings, maybe I can put it that way, that just because you see, does not mean that you have a critical eye. It doesn't mean that you've learned the way to look at a painting by a Dutch master or by, I don't know, I'm going to stumble here so I'm not going to go, but abstract impressionist or something like that. Right? You don't necessarily know what to look for. And so, we can all benefit from description and that includes audio description as well.

Justice Shorter:

Yeah.

Leona Godin:

And as Olivia was pointing out, different people see and hear works of art in very different ways, and I think that it's useful for all of us to hear how differently we experience the world. I think it's kind of one of those things that can really help us to appreciate diversity in kind of the larger sense that's... Just appreciate diversity. I'm going to stop right there.

Justice Shorter:

Yeah, no, that's a wonderful place to stop because I'm going to bring Olivia in, in just a moment to talk about diversity and documenting diversity in a myriad of ways. But before I do that, I do just want to ask you, Leona, is there a project, kind of a sensory centric project that you would most wish to see in the world?

Leona Godin:

Oh, boy. Well, I, at the risk of tooting my own horn, I'm really excited about some work that I've done with one of the very few scent-based galleries in the world, really. It's called Olfactory Art Keller. It's in New York City. And the work that I've done there is about bringing these photographs that I've been writing about, translations into touch and smell. And I think that people have been very excited about this work because many of us spend a lot of time, I think, in front of our screens and we are constantly saturated with visuals. And again, speaking to this idea of being sensory beings, that I feel

like creating artworks that appeal to our other senses right now is very attractive.

And so, one of the things that I get excited about are museum exhibits that take into account that there are many ways to tell a story through the senses. And there's a museum that's opening up called The Dot Experience that's down at American, what is it, American Printing House down in Louisville that are doing some really exciting work. And I just think the more we can realize, again, this multimodal experiences are something that is a very human endeavor and not just like an access box to check, the more exciting all of our experiences will be in cultural institutions.

Justice Shorter:

Could not agree more. Olivia, let me bring you back in here. Can you talk to us a little bit more about why it's so vital to document diverse disabled experience? Leona was just talking about it a few moments ago, but can you talk to us about why it's essential to not only tell disabled stories? A lot of groups will do that. They'll tell someone's story or they'll share the perspective or share something, but why is it also equally as important to fund disabled storytellers, producers, directors, writers, et cetera?

Olivia Dreisinger:

Well, I think that disability, especially in the media, it's oversaturated by a few different tropes, often not told by disabled people themselves, which is disabled people is inspirational. Or the most

common thing is how someone became disabled. Those are really the dominant narratives that follow disabled people in... Sometimes, I just want to see a disabled person doing something without being like, and here's how they became a wheelchair user or... You know?

Justice Shorter:

Mm-hmm.

Olivia Dreisinger:

I don't want this kind of tragedy attached to it and then has this sort of narrative arc of this before and after or the infantilization that often happens as well to disabled people. I'll just do maybe a popular example right now is I would say Love on the Spectrum is a show on Netflix and it follows autistic individuals looking for romantic relationships. And I think the show, the way that it's edited and presented, shows them in a very infantilized view.

But then if you look at their own content, their own Instagrams, like them talking, they have so much more going on than how the show edits them. And I think that's really why I think it's really important to support disabled storytellers, disabled makers, because I think sometimes they don't want to talk about their disability, they want to make other things. There's so much other things to do or they'll make something about disability, but they won't disclose what their disability is because I don't know, I feel like there's some sort of the

narrative desire, tell us what happened to you, tell us what happened-

Justice Shorter:

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Olivia Dreisinger:

... in order to sympathize with disability or to care about it. And I just think that the more funding that gets to us disabled people, the more kind of fun experiences or different perspectives we'll be able to share with the world and influence culture, like scented gallery things.

Justice Shorter:

Yeah.

Olivia Dreisinger:

Yeah. I mean, I saw, this isn't related, but I did see, I think somewhere that Marie Antoinette's perfume is being remade or something as part of a [inaudible 00:33:58] Marie Antoinette. So I would be interested in knowing what she smelled like.

Justice Shorter:

Absolutely. I hear you on that and I love you bringing up going beyond just a person's disability and this insistence on the inquiry around someone's disability or how they obtain their disability. I used to deploy out to disaster areas all across the country, and I would have to tell other federal workers and state officials or local organizations, can we stop asking these invasive questions because many of them are not at all related to why someone is showing up here for a disaster assistance.

And forcing someone to relive a story if it is connected to a traumatic event over and over and over, just to sign up for services after disaster is inhumane and it's unnecessary and it's detrimental and it's discouraging. It dissuades a lot of people from showing up or even engaging. It causes a lot of people to shut down.

So it's just really, really important. I'm so thrilled that you brought that up. It's a really huge piece. Leona, you have worked extensively, and we mentioned this before, on blindness and photography. So I just wonder if you've learned any lessons about inclusion and innovation that it might be helpful for funders to know as well, just any top lessons you've taken away.

Leona Godin:

Oh, my goodness. Well, it relates directly to what we're just talking about, right, that so often, our cultural productions are created by non-disabled people and that they kind of shape the narratives to those kinds of plots that revolve around the disability as if a disability is not part of our larger identity. I mean, oftentimes, I try and explain it to people in so far as like, I don't know what part of

who I am is impacted by my blindness anymore than I know of who I am is impacted by me being a white woman.

These identities are so complicated and I think that mainstream media especially, tends to really flatten the experience of disability. And the more we can be allowed to take control of those narratives, the better. And I think that's true for institutions in general. And one thing that has been really helpful for me to frame this, is this notion that I first encountered in a book called Crip Authorship that says that disability is a creative force and I've taken this as my tagline which is, blindness as creative force.

And I think what this helps us all think about is, it's a huge problem that inclusion is often thought of as very asymmetrical, that it's non-disabled people giving access to disabled people, in particular in blindness. And that's not actually inclusion, right?

Justice Shorter:

No.

Leona Godin:

The only way to have true inclusion is if we understand, for example, what I do with photography, right? If we think about the world of photography, the culture of photography as being made sure, maybe photographs by blind people, but also curators, curating exhibits with blind people involved. The very notion of a blind curator hasn't quite cropped up yet or blind critics. I mean, this is a big reason why

I've gotten into photography in the first place, that it's really insulting to have, okay, find a photographer, take a picture of a blind person, but also then only sighted critics talking about this photo, that we need to be critics, that we need to be makers, that we need to be thinkers and curators, and all of the things that go into our experience of, in particular, say photography in a museum or where I'm working in a library. But I think that's true across the board, that it can't just be this asymmetrical relationship of giving things to blind people that we need to be involved in the learning, the teaching, the knowing of these objects in the world.

Justice Shorter:

I want to extend that a few yards and bring Olivia in here because you talked about so many creatives and curators, and people who are involved with the process photographers. Olivia, I want to ask you, do you have any direct advice for folks about how they can support and share the work of independent creators and producers? You, yourself, are documentary filmmaker and so, any advice on how funders can reach out and support disabled creatives?

Olivia Dreisinger:

Well, I'll highlight a few groups. Well, there's RestFest Film Festival. It's a disability-led film festival that takes place completely online to account for disabled time. It says, no need to get out of bed or off the couch, no worries if you're half asleep, you're always welcome here. I would recommend to check out what they're kind of doing,

what they're modeling because the film industry is hyper, hyper able, and it is so exclusionary and so many barriers for disabled people to even make anything in the film industry. So I would recommend them to see kind of what they're modeling.

And then I would also highlight, this is a new thing, Disability Media Alliance. It's a resource for disabled non-fiction media makers. And I believe that they're going to be handing out, actually, I shouldn't say that. I don't know. There [inaudible 00:40:08] previous group through IDA that helps support directly financially disabled media makers. So hopefully, this group will be too or just drawing more attention to it because we need funding. And also, another thing to point out with funding is that there should be funding allocated specifically for access needs. I think that that is never really thought about. Disability is expensive and extra money does need to often go to us in order to support us to make things, but I think it's a worthwhile contribution.

Justice Shorter:

Absolutely. I will look into those two groups myself because it sounds wonderful. I would love to attend RestFest. That's [inaudible 00:40:53]. Yeah.

Leona Godin:

Could I poke in here [inaudible 00:40:55] because I realized what I didn't say about this whole, I think, need for in terms of funding institutions and stuff. I will tell you, nothing makes my blood boil

faster than when I read diversity statements that do not include disability. It immediately signals to me that this is not understood to be part of our cultural landscape. I think we're really fighting at this point for just the very idea of disability culture and that disabled creators, like we've been saying, are so vital. And so, when I look at say, funding organizations for grants and things like that, that talk about identity and their search and their interest in lifting up marginalized voices and disability isn't included, is just an immediate signaling to me that we are not welcome as cultural creators.

Justice Shorter:

And I think that's really pertinent because there has been so much rollback of diversity, equity-

Leona Godin:

Yes.

Justice Shorter:

... and inclusion efforts, right? So not only is there erasure or invisibility in terms of disability and visibilizing individuals with disabilities and not having that included in diversity statements, now we're seeing the purge of people even having these statements on diversity to begin with, right? And so, instead of people building on what was already there or further embedding disability into their

framework, their policies, their programming, now we see a lot of things being completely dismantled, diluted, hidden, not promoted as much at all. And so, all of these things are areas that a lot of disability advocates and activists and artists are trying to contend with, are trying to challenge, right?

Leona Godin:

[inaudible 00:42:49].

Justice Shorter:

And are trying to deal with on their day-to-day as they too still seek funding to do the work that they feel most called to do in this world. I want to ask you both a question that's kind of along the same thread, and it is about describing the difficult. And you all have spoken about this both individually throughout the course of our conversation today. You both have shared individually, about how often individuals with disabilities are infantilized, how often individuals are preemptively not given information or how someone will preemptively make a decision around what individuals with disabilities will need to know. And I'm just curious about this.

So for an example, someone may describe a picture to me and say, oh, this is a picture of an arrest, or I'll see some photos online, or I'll hear some photos with my screen reader. And I'll just hear that this is a picture of an arrest versus when someone I know gives me a more detailed description and they'll say something akin to, "Well, this is actually a picture of a Black woman who is face down on the

ground and she is surrounded by six officers, one of whom has his knee in her back. And there is a small child off to the side who is weeping and being held back by an older Latinx woman."

And that, to me, gives far more context than simply saying that this is a picture of an arrest. So can you all speak to why it matters to give that level of detail even when it is uncomfortable, even when it's painful, even when we are in a rush and there's a sense of urgency because there's so many difficult or dangerous or harmful scenes that are unfolding via these images, but why is it still important to make sure that the descriptions around those images are still made available to folks with vision loss? Olivia, let me ask you.

Olivia Dreisinger:

Well, it's a lot to take in these images and then to translate that sort of grief as well. I want to think about that access is also a way to check in, like what level of information do you want? I want you to have multiple levels based on where you are in that day or where you are emotionally, because sometimes, especially if you're, say on Instagram as a sighted person, you're kind of taking in these images without consent as you're going through stories that you're going to see something that's upsetting. So I wonder if there is these ways to check in with the different levels of access that you would like to have as well with image descriptions. But I was thinking of poetry and Alt Text as Poetry, poetry is often said as the language of love. So I want to think about loving access to this kind of information. I don't know if that made sense.

Justice Shorter:

It does. It does. It does. It does. And Leona, let me bring you in, your response.

Leona Godin:

Well, I think context is everything, of course. But I do think that the way, if you were creating alt text or an image description, I think it's always important to realize what is catching your attention and how much time are you giving it. I think that sometimes where we go wrong is when we try to navigate somebody else or curate somebody else's experience, right? There's going to be a time, if you're just working really fast, I would imagine that as a sighted person, you're not taking in an entire image. You're like, oh, you see somebody on the ground, you don't take in that image.

But where I think we go wrong is if we say, these are all the things that I see, the crying child, the things that point directly to my heart, but I don't think that this, but I don't think that a blind person could take this in in the same way, like curating and changing your own subjectivity, which again, we cannot help but be subjective when we see difficult, horrifying images, to try and then sanitize it for somebody else is where the real problem lies, I would say. And that's when we get into, it's that asymmetry that I'm talking about that blind people are going to want or need a different lesser than experience.

As soon as that happens, that's when we need to fight, right? And I think that's why people like Thomas Reid are so important because

the problem is that it's always, since the time of audio description in movies, it's been created by sighted people deciding what blind people want to know, right? And therein lies the problem, I think are... People like Thomas Reid are so important because when we decide what kind of access we want, exactly what you're pointing to, and we start to make that access and get paid to make that access, then you see a shift in the content.

Justice Shorter:

Yeah, absolutely.

Olivia Dreisinger:

[inaudible 00:48:27], can I add one thing?

Justice Shorter:

Sure.

Olivia Dreisinger:

I hope I didn't come across as suggesting to withhold information in the descriptions. I was more kind of thinking about it with difficult images. As a person with psychiatric illnesses and different triggers and stuff to think through if this image is triggering for me and then I have to write a triggering description, asking the person who might, I don't know. This might be more of a thought experiment that I need

to think through more, in terms of content warnings and how that would influence how to write about that image as well or just feeling unsafe emotions, trying to describe image, that was more what my thinking was. Yeah, or just different levels of emotional access dependent on the person who wants that. I hope that makes sense.

Justice Shorter:

It makes sense. And I also wanted to use this as an opportunity to shout out Alt Text Palestine, which was a wonderful effort that was led by folks with disabilities who were trying to provide more access to everything, the genocide that's taking place in Palestine right now. And so, that was really helpful. And we had one of the creators on earlier this season. So we'll maybe drop the link to that episode in the show notes or you can go back through the playlist, the thread and find that episode, but it was wonderful. So I'm hoping that the two of you can dream us out by way of this question. What poetic descriptions would you use to express your hopes for a more accessible future? And Olivia, I want to start with you.

Olivia Dreisinger:

Well, as a disclaimer for the poetic description, since I've been a disabled parent for the last 16 months now, most of my time is spent just saying the same phrases or single words over again. So I guess that's how I'll go out here. But I'd say flexibility, access to childcare would be a great accessible future so that disabled people can become parents, and they can raise amazing children in their own

ways to then go out into the world and also care about disability because they have disabled parents. And also, about just having power as disabled people, that's [inaudible 00:51:08] say.

Justice Shorter:

Okay, got it, got it. I love these hopes. I love these simplified, concise, but expressive descriptions as Leona mentioned, concise but expressive. Leona, I'm tossing over to you. Close us out. Any poetic descriptions for the hopes you have in terms of a more accessible future?

Leona Godin:

Thank you. I'm going to go novelistic here and talk about a book that probably many people have read by Octavia Butler called, Lilith's Brood. And it's so much about diversity and one of the sort of, so it's aliens encountering humans. And one of the things that the aliens who are much more sort of, shall we say, broad-minded about all sorts of things, say about humans is that the fatal flaw of humans is that we are super intelligent and super hierarchical.

And I guess, my dream for a future would be to dismantle our hierarchical thinking that it is antithetical to diversity in so far as when we're constantly trying to rank what's better. Specifically, I'm thinking right now of the senses, right? That vision is the most important. Smell is down at the bottom. Touch is somewhere in the middle. Right? When we make these attempts to rank our experience of the world, we rob everybody of the things we can learn

from each other. And so I guess my dream for the future is to dismantle hierarchies and just be done with them. Full stop.

Justice Shorter:

So beautiful future [inaudible 00:53:01]. Leona, Olivia, thank you both so much for joining us. If you want to keep your learning journey going, visit the Disability & Philanthropy Forum at disabilityphilanthropy.org. I'm Justice Shorter, and this has been another episode of Disability Inclusion: Required. Thanks so much for tuning in and join us again next time.