Leah Meyerhoff: Hi, my name is Leah Meyerhoff. I am the founder of Film Fatales which is a nonprofit that advocates for parity in the film industry and supports a community of a thousand women and non-binary feature film and television directors nationwide, many of whom are in the room tonight. Yay! [applause] And here in Los Angeles Film Fatales hosts a monthly speaker series where a pair of our members engage in a conversation of interest to the wider community. Tonight's discussion: "Disabilities On Screen and Off" will be led by Tchaiko Omawale and Nasreen Alkhateeb, who we'll be introducing in more detail in just a moment, but first I would like to thank Film Independent for having us here tonight, [applause] and RespectAbility for helping with this conversation. And now Lauren Applebaum will say a few words about RespectAbility and what it means to be a person with a disability. [to Lauren] Thank you so much.

Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you everyone for being here tonight. We really appreciate you making your time to be here. RespectAbility is a nonprofit that was started almost seven years ago with the goal of increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. And why we care so much about the film industry is because, obviously, what we see on TV and in film influences how we act in real life. And so we were really really pleased to be able to partner with Film Fatales to present this panel to you, and for Film Independent to graciously offer this space to make this event happen. So I was asked to explain what a disability is - and everyone in this room probably could have their own definition for what defines a disability, so I'm going to share it - I apologize for reading, it's a technical definition, so I'm going to share what it is according to the Americans with Disabilities Act. So it defines a disability as an individual with a disability is a person who one, has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; two, has a record of such impairment; or three, is regarded as having such an impairment. So that is very much technical jargon - but people often say, "well, what is an actual disability?" and there is no comprehensive list of disabilities. There are ones that you might see: someone who uses a wheelchair like Tatiana, someone who is deaf or someone who is blind. Then there are ones that you cannot see: things like if you have a learning disability, like dyslexia. Mental health is also considered a disability. Cancer is also technically considered a disability. So it is a very wide definition and I wanted to share that as to have a little bit of background as we go into this conversation on how to include disabilities both on and off screen, especially in terms of accessibility to ensure that people with disabilities could be included on set, as well as included as reviewers. I'd like to now pass us off to Film Independent. [applause]

Paul Cowling: Thank you. Welcome. I'm Paul Cowling, I'm the Associate Director of Film Education at Film Independent. For those of you who don't know us, our mission is to champion creative independence in visual storytelling and embrace a community of artists who embrace diversity, innovation and uniqueness of vision - that's actually on the wall outside. You probably know us best for producing the Independent Spirit Awards, which takes place the day before the Oscars on a big tent on the beach, but we have year-round programs, we have artist development programs that produce a lot of filmmaker labs to support the new generation of filmmakers and we have events in this room, twice a month for our members. Our membership is seven thousand strong and growing - it's open to all. Members get to vote on the Spirit Awards and partake in many of our events including Film Independent Presents, which embodies screenings and famous libraries as well, so you can find out more at FilmIndependent.org. But welcome - it's a thrill to host you all and I hope you enjoy tonight. Thanks! [applause]

Leah Meyerhoff: Now, to introduce our two moderators this evening, we have Nasreen Alkhateeb who is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, director and DP, with films at Tribeca Film Festival, SlamDance, the Webby Awards, South by Southwest, IFC Films and Netflix. And we met in this space last year - she's an alumna of the RespectAbility Lab and now she's a member of Film Fatales. And then Tchaiko Omawale, who is an award-winning director of "Clean Sugar" and the feature film "Solace," which won a special jury mention at the LA Film Festival. Tchaiko's also an alumna of the Sundance Writer's Lab and a Tribeca... Okay Tchaiko is not those things... [laughter] Tchaiko is an amazing filmmaker. Thank you for being here. And now Nasreen is gonna introduce our incredible speaker, so thank you all. [applause]

Nasreen Alkhateeb: Hi everyone. Thank you for being here tonight. Tatiana Lee is an actress, model and Hollywood inclusionist at RespectAbility. Tatiana's dedicated her life to fighting for inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of mass media and plays an integral role in the daily operations of the RespectAbility Lab, which is how we met.

Tatiana Lee: Mm-hmm.

Nasreen Alkhateeb: Ashley Eakin is a writer-director of "Single," which was scheduled to premiere at South By later this month, has worked on "Crazy Rich Asians" and the new Quibi series "Survive." Michele Spitz, founder of Woman of Her Word, is a professional voice-over artist, public speaker, advocate and philanthropist, dedicated to making the world of digital media and film accessible to blind and low-vision audiences. Shari Bisnaught is the costume designer for The Best - I'm sorry, I always get to best too soon - is the costume designer for the feature film "Best Summer Ever," featuring a fully integrated cast and crew of people with and without disabilities. And, that is everyone, so we're going to start with a question to Michele, and before we do, I'd love to play a clip from her work, and before we play a clip I'd just like you to describe it, because it sounds much better coming from you than it does from me.

Michele Spitz: So this is a compilation video of six different small vignettes of audio description with different genres so you can sort of assess what it is depending upon what the media is, and it varies per platform, so you'll experience it as you listen to it. But it goes very quickly.

Michele Spitz Audio Description: A full yellow moon is obscured by clouds and the tops of trees. Aaron stands in a corral in front of a horse stall. Yellow light warms the wraparound porch of a large two-story house. A woman glances at Lutz. She places her pass in the hand of the child next to her. She kneels and kisses her. Lutz takes the girl's hand. The woman's chin quivers. Her eyes fell. Fingers trace a raised line map in Braille from the top to the bottom. Young Woman Speaking: My destination: Portugal. [laughs] Michele Spitz Audio Description: A young woman lies on a bed on her stomach. Her brown hair is pulled in a ponytail. The balloon floats past another sign that points to the right. It says "armadillo." The mouse pulls the banana. The giraffe steps on the string. The mouse tugs. They performed live together only once more, on the rooftop of their offices in central London. Savile Row 1969. [band sings] "Don't let me down." The dance begins. Seven women in long, white, backless dresses to the left and two couples on the right. The women in the corps de ballet are en pointe as they move in unison lifting their arms above their heads, and turning together. The bridge goes out of focus and dissolves into a gray haze, drops of red and black ink spread across water surface, billowing into faint clouds of diluted color. Thin, rough brushstrokes appear, slowly forming a handwriting tile. "States of Grace."

Audience Member: Wow. [Applause]

Nasreen Alkhateeb: So, question Michele: At what point in the production process do you start the disability question? Michelle Spitz: In terms of the audience? In terms of the content?

Nasreen Alkhateeb: At what point in the production process do you think about people of all abilities, of people with disabilities. When does that start for you? So, it comes in two phases depending on the content that I'm narrating, or the film out chosen to give a grant to. A lot of the projects I've worked on are based on disability subject matters, so the conversation starts in the very beginning. The writing process thereafter is writing the details about what that content is going to be for audio description, and then of course the audience, being low-vision and blind audiences, is the next step whether or not it's a subject film - in other words about a disability or not about a disability. So it's basically - the overall concept is - how is this processed, how is the information processed, what is the script writing, how are we articulating it and how is this all coming together seamlessly. So it has a sort of a lovely flow to it.

Nasreen Alkhateeb: Tatiana, the next quesiton is for you. When do you ask your crew and talent what resources they need to accomplish their job?

Tatiana Lee: I would say, from a standpoint like if I was telling someone that is doing a production including people with disabilities, it should come very early - as soon as you decide who you're casting. I think they should let them know, ask them and give them the autonomy to ask for what they need or even go a step further and say, "what do you need to execute this job properly?" because sometimes it's not that much, and a lot of people think accommodating someone on a set is super expensive - it costs less than five hundred dollars to accommodate someone with different forms of disability on a set. So, if you're gonna get someone who's a great actor and you're only spending a couple hundred dollars - probably less than that - to accommodate them, the impact is going to be a lot huger from that, so you're coming up on top still. And for myself as an actor understanding that, I let people know what I need right away. Once I know I have the job it's like okay, I can do this but this is what I need, and I try to do it in a way where - because sometimes as a person with a disability, sometimes we don't want to rock the boat because we're afraid of not being invited back, so sometimes we're afraid, so when the production gives us that opportunity to say, "No I want to know what you need so you can do this job, I know you could do this job but what do you need?" and I just let them know, "okay I need this, I need an extra chair so I can change my clothes and you know little small things or whatever I need to make sure it's - there's no cords in the way and kind of that's it and it's not as huge of a big deal as a lot of people may seem like it may be that daunting but it really isn't."

Nasreen Alkhateeb: Thank you.

Tatiana Lee: Mm-hmm.

Nasreen Alkhateeb: The next question is for Ashley but I'd love to show a clip of your work before I ask you. Yeah this is my trailer to my short film that was produced in the AFI Directing Workshop for Women. And sadly we were supposed to show this at South by, but [murmur in audience] [applause]

Nasreen Alkhateeb: Ashley, there are visibile and nonvisible disabilities - so, in your interpretation, when is it safe as a filmmaker to identify yourself as someone with a disability? When is it worth mentioning and when is it okay to check the box?

Ashley Eakin: I think it's just personal, per person - I know for myself it took a long time for me to be okay with that label, and if anyone placed that label on me I'd feel very offended, but that was a whole internal journey that I went through on my own and I'm in a place where I'm very proud to be a part of the community now, but I think - let people bring that information to you - if they want to talk about their disability, let them - I don't think you should place anything on them or say - assume anything, because I think that's where it can be offensive or, I just always let the person with the disability do the talking and the way sometimes you can get to that is by asking questions and saying things like "what do you need?" or "how can we accommodate you?" I think that's the big - with invisible disabilities, just let them bring it up - I wouldn't assume anything in the beginning. So I don't know if that's kind of-

Nasreen Alkhateeb: That answers it, yeah. The last - Shari, I'd love to show a clip of your work before answering.

Shari Bisnaught: Okay, so this is "Ready to Ride" or "Best Summmer Ever" it's actually a musical and this is after Ricky Wilson, who's our lead, basically has this wonderful kind of "aha" moment just accepting himself and having his family accept him, so this is him just breaking into the town and living his best life - and this was also supposed to premiere at South By [Audience murmurs] Yeah, and this is so dope. [Laughter]

[Upbeat Music] Ricky [Singing]: Tonight, I’m dancing free, gonna let the whole world come and dance with me I got no reason to hold it all inside Sun is going down on a west side swing, warming up a place that I’ve never been Take it or leave it, I’m making up my mind [Choir joins in] Tonight, we’re dancing free Let the whole world come around and see I’ve got no reason to hold it all inside Sun is going down on a west side swing, warming up a place that I’ve never been Look around and see who’s on your side I’m ready to ride [Choir only] Ready to ride, ready to ride, ride I’m ready to ride! [Music fades out] [Applause]

Nasreen Alkhateeb: So in terms of accessibility features, some of the larger institutions like AFI and South by Southwest have yet to dedicate accessible resources like captioning and audio description files to filmmakers. Have you ever had to come out of pocket to fund something like that? How should we change that process?

Shari Bisnaught: I have yet to come out of pocket for that. I think just in terms of - we need to make space for everyone, regardless of if somebody having a disability, somebody being of a different race or gender or sexual orientation, like, it is important to put those things first. It's just - everything needs to be an option, it needs to be mandatory that everything is an option, and then that's it. I'm sorry I'm just like very cut and dry about it. There shouldn't be any wiggle room about it. [laughter] I have something to add to that - just a little, 'cause I did not know about audio description or closed captioning, and the capabilities of the devices that they have now, that, most leaders - I learned a lot of this from Michele, she gave me a grant for my film - and so I was able to put audio descriptions and closed captioning on my film "Single" that was gonna have that in the shorts program - it would be the only short there that would have that, but they did have the devices in that theater to be able to, so other people could access the film, and I really - I'm a person who's lived a whole life with a disability, but I don't usually think about the other disabilities in my community and it's so important that we do, because this is what Michele is supposed to - once you learn about it and how amazing it is that your story can reach other people, you really want to advocate for it and I did - she gave me a grant to get them done, which was amazing, but at AFI, they don't have the capability to put that into a DCP, so like the technical stuff, AFI doesn't have the ability to do it, so I had to go to an outside post-house to get it done. And I did have to pay the extra money, but it's like, everyone at South by was so supportive, they were like "this is about principle," "maybe you'll start a trend," it's something that someone has to fight for and I mean it was only like, a hundred bucks or something - it's nothing in the grand scheme of making a film. But I think it is something that you really have to fight for it and if you do push - South by at first wasn't answering and then they said no and then they said yes and it was this whole journey that we went on where - and now I've been talking to the DGA and they have assistive listening devices, they don't have audio description capability or no they don't have closed captioning capability, they do have audio description, so it's just about checking which places have it and if someone talks about it, I think that's how you get it in the space, so that's something that, because I met Michele, and now I'm like an advocate for it. [laughter]

Tchaiko Omawale: I think actually it would be awesome to hear from everybody who has made a film like, those are really helpful concrete examples - an example of like oh $500 is sort of all it would cost to accommodate me, can you - can each person maybe give, like I don't know, three things - if that's not too much - but like three things that are super practical, because if there are other filmmakers in the audience, those are things that even - I don't have a physical disability but as a micro budget indie filmmaker, I would want to know what things I should think about when I'm budgeting so that I can actually put my money where my mouth is, believing in inclusivity, and I want to add to that that, I think that the burden shouldn't be on people who have disabilities to - I understand what you were saying, but I was wondering if you guys can articulate in a way that - oh I know what it is, this is a much better way of saying it [laughter] This is a much better - I'm sorry, I'm pregnant and I'm a little loopy. [laughter] Thank you, this is the excuse for everything. [Laughter] In the one to three examples, if there are resources that we can look to - so for example if there's a website that has - these are the things that should make your set - like how environmental people have a list of how you make your set eco, whatever, friendly - are there places that we can all go to to learn more about other disabilities and what we need to do to have them on - to make space for that on set and, anyway I think you guys get... but if everybody could say something and then I have one more question as well after that.

Tatiana Lee: I'll start. So, we actually at RespectAbility have a Hollywood inclusion resource guide, so we have a lot of great information in there about different disabilities, different accommodations, how much it costs, different resources of where you can find it, and I would say a lot of things like captioning, depending on... it's super easy - first of all, I don't know, but if people upload your content to YouTube, I don't know if you know, but it does automatic captions - and it's free. So - and sometimes basically it may mess up a word or two and you just got to go fix it, and - but you have free captioning, and then I think Final Cut Pro now has a new version where they'll add the caption into it, too, so that's the captioning thing - I know Michele can talk about the audio description - and that, and when it comes to accommodating a person with a disability, that's whether they're an actor or something - ask. Don't be afraid to ask that person: majority of the time, that person with a disability knows what they need. They're a professional - don't assume that they're not a professional and they're not a professional at their job at what they're doing. So, ask them: "what do you need," "what can I do," and I think that's the most important thing because a lot of people assume that we don't know what we need, but we do. And those would be some of my tips.

Shari Bisnaught: I think my answer is gonna be much different because it's - I didn't make this film, you know? I designed all the costumes, so coming from that place, I think time, obviously - we need to allot more time - which is money - Yes, which is - yes a hundred percent, but really in the grand scheme of things it's not that much money - there's accessible clothing now, there's magnets that we can use as closures, there's velcro that we can use as closures - I guess you can apply some of the same theater costume principles to production, just in terms of quick changes, because that also bleeds into making things accessible because you're having to change within 30 seconds. And then again, asking questions - most people know what fits them the best and what feels good for them: fabrics, how they like to put clothing on and take clothing off, I think just having an open dialogue is super important at least in my field; and then having a really great seamstress handy - is key. [laughter]

Tatiana Lee: Hold on - then I just want to add one more thing: in the all grand scheme of this, according to Nielsen, the disability market is worth a trillion dollars - we are the third largest market in the world. Okay. [Laughter and Crosstalk]

Michele Spitz: So, actually, I also gave a grant for Best Summer Ever, I just finished recording it -

Shari Bisnaught: Oh, yay!

Michele Spitz: So, that was a lot of fun to audio describe, by the way - it was complicated, it was a very wonderful project.

Shari Bisnaught: Thanks.

Michele Spitz: I have a couple of things to say about this. I've been doing this now for almost seven years, and a majority of my content is about disability content, and then a lot of it now includes other things like documentaries and narratives, because these are things that may not get audio described. And in my process of this journey, I have created grants that didn't exist because they aren't there - they're very hard to come by. So the San Francisco Film Festival is now starting a new program with people that would receive grants and we've talked about how they could assess a grant, how much money we're talking about - so there's a couple of ways to look at this: that, to put a line in your budget you may or may not have this extra money to do it, but I would overall - I mean I could go on the peripheral outer lines at this, I would say $5,000 for audio description and captioning, and the staff to oversee it and be sure it's actually utilized and pushed out and there are people overseeing it and things like that - that takes staff and time, right? If you don't have the wherewithal for that, there are people that give grants like myself - people can come to me occasionally - [laughter] I only do a certain amount a year. I hope in the near future, I really do, that there will be more people getting grants - that you'll be able to identify a little bit easier, but there will be people that care more about it. So the subject matter is becoming more evident, more to the surface, and we need more funding for it. But if you do decide to create the asset before you get distribution - that's if you get distribution, I hope you all do - or, for example, if you're going to go to the festival circuit, there are going to be venues which don't accommodate audio description and captioning, unfortunately - that Sundance, for example, just did. The Ruderman Foundation funded that. South by Southwest, thankfully, is implementing this concept, and the San Francisco Film Festival, so on and so forth. So you're gonna see a lot more of the festivals start taking the assets, so my recommendation - my little pennies worth: if you can do this in advance of anything else, then that means that your media goes out with all the accessible assets, and you can try to ensure that it goes with the journey of the film; as opposed to waiting to see if you got distribution, and maybe the distributor decided to do audio description, maybe they didn't, maybe they did caption the promo like we do captioning... and therefore it's already in place - and especially if it's a film about a disability, of any kind - in fact that's a no-brainer: any film with a disability subject-based content should be accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing and blind and low-vision audiences - no-brainer. So it's something to think about, and I'm sure there are monies to be had and other people that are willing to help, other than myself - you just have to find them and you can always call me and I can try and maybe redirect you. But that's what I would say to everybody - if you can, do, if you can't, ask someone that can, but do your very best to have it go with the journey of your media, whatever the subject base is.

Tchaiko Omawale: Can I ask a follow-up question before Ashley gives her response? So my film was a micro-budget film and I guess - it was dealing with mental health stuff so invisible disability...

Michele Spitz: Sure.

Tchaiko Omawale: I had never heard about audio description before but I knew about closed captioning.

Michele Spitz: Sure

Tchaiko Omawale: And this is so particular to all my intersection so as a black woman making a film about cutting and eating disorders and things that are already not visibly noticed on us and then that disability which I'm learning now is a disability - an invisible disability - the money is so important to me because I wasn't getting money for my film, I had to do that all crowdsourcing and so my follow-up question in that context is, are there ways in which you are communicating or you can give advice, maybe there's somebody in the audience or somebody watches this, of how people who are in charge of funds or people who do labs - what are ways that you can spread the word, because the filmmakers themselves - it's hard to just say, you should include $5,000 - I think the emphasis needs to be, the people who have access to money talking to other people with access to money to say these are all really important integral things. If you just speak to that a little bit and then Ashley can answer her.

Michele Spitz: Okay so I'm going to answer this question not as an audio describer but as a philanthropist.

Tchaiko Omawale: Yes.

Michele Spitz: So. That's a big part of my life, and so I am often speaking with other people about this - I do a lot of public speaking and I do a lot of integrated conversations - about considering this and making money available for it. So really, the bottom line for me, and then I think for everybody else is to talk about it as much as you can, talk about it with people that are in the funding divisions, talk about to the institutions - like this one here and make this part of the bigger conversation. It will continue to grow - you will have funders and eventually, once they're learning about it and understand it and experience it - it's one thing to talk about it, it's another thing to actually experience it: once you experience it, other people get it. I always tell people, close your eyes, open your eyes, imagine what this is like, and it's very impactful. So, the conversation is mainstream - it's for all of us to talk about as often as we can. And I understand exactly what you're saying - I'm on a mission. [Laughter]

Ashley Eakin: I think for me - so my film I had one woman who's born with one arm and then a guy who was born with one hand and a lot of the practical - kind of getting over the practical challenges, is just spending time with them and doing a lot of pre-pro with them and getting to talk to them about their disability and how it affects them - if there are certain things that they can or can't do or they feel uncomfortable doing or how has it been their childhood - just to know kind of what areas to touch on. My film really digs into identity and disability so they were very open with me, talking about stories growing up in their past and how they kind of handle this identity. so that was good so we weren't figuring this out on set but we weren't crossing boundaries, so you're not losing time. I don't know any other practical - I think...

Tchaiko Omawale: Well, you're a producer as well? Or a director?

Ashley Eakin: If you’re an indie filmmaker you’re a producer as well. [Laughter]

Tchaiko Omawale: Maybe what are things you would need like, let's say for your next project, what are like practical things that you would need to have happen so you can do the best work you can do?

Ashley Eakin: Right, and I mean I think one huge thing is - so I used to work for Jon Chu, who directed "Crazy Rich Asians" - I was his assistant for two and a half years, I went to Malaysia and Singapore with them, I'm someone who, I can't carry a lot of heavy stuff, I have a visible like gait in my walking - I think... it's just listening to - I think first of all, hire people who are diverse and different and people who can be on your side, who can kind of give that voice, and I think it was having people available that I could trust to tell them I couldn't do something, so maybe you are that ally to someone, that could be if they're struggling with anything, maybe they can talk to you. I don't know what I physically would need as a director... right now, I mean I'm still - my sets because they've been independent projects, it’s just been me on the directing, there hasn't been a big studio yet, I haven't run up against any challenges that I haven't been able to get past yet. So, I think for now it's just - be that ally for someone to be able to go to you.

Tchaiko Omawale: And then - I'll just say this as somebody who's pregnant which, I think you can get disability for it, but I don't know if it's counted as a disability. [Laughter] But, I was on Facebook and I think I was probably just talking about being pregnant, sort of afraid of career and money and just my exhaustion and blah blah blah, and a woman that I know - I'm having pregnancy brain, Can somebody help me with the name of the filmmaker who did the film, she has chronic fatigue..

Michele Spitz: Oh I know exactly what you're talking about.

Ashley Eakin: Brea, Jen Brea.

Tchaiko Omawale: Jen- Jen, right. So then Jen commented under my comment that she was like actually a lot of the conversations for - I know what it was, sorry - Free the Work and some other organizations have a parental, pregnancy-something for DGA, to try and make it more inclusive of people having children, and Jen was saying a lot of the conversations she's trying to have to make film more accessible for people with disabilities, fall along the same lines of what pregnant women want, and I — wasn't obvious to me but it also is kind of obvious where it's like, if we can all, whether you have disabilities or not, create structures and institutions that benefit people who, I'm gonna say on the margins for whatever intersection we're talking about, like it actually benefits everybody else, and so I just wanted to say that out loud and then - actually might have two questions; I have a dream question for everybody. How much time do we have before we go to Q&A?

Michele Spitz: How ever much time you wanted.

Tatiana Lee: And I was going to make a point to the point that you made.

Tchaiko Omawale: Make your point.

Tatiana Lee: I was gonna make a point back to you and it actually does, because if we have what we call universal design, which is -

Tchaiko Omawale: Yes!

Tatiana Lee: - considered for everyone, it makes it work for everyone and I was like I bet a lot of people don't know but texting was made for people who are deaf, or the fact that more people who aren't deaf consume more video content or watch their videos with the sound down - I think it's something like thirty or forty percent... Lauren Appelbaum: Eighty percent on Facebook.

Tatiana Lee: Eighty percent on Facebook - so there's people who aren’t deaf that use captions and so those are things so it benefits everyone, so think about that.

Tchaiko Omawale: And I think that shift is important of not "ooh, what can we do to help you?"

Tatiana Lee: Exactly.

Tchaiko Omawale: But it's actually, you're helping us, we're all helping each other and so, okay so here's my - should I give it two parts or one part. Okay I'll do the first one and then afterwards. Okay, so - for the people who are filmmakers, so Ashley and I think you, you're an actress - okay well we'll see how many of you guys want to - yeah. So, sometimes I have to be a little verbose first for the question. Sometimes I get really irritated with the conversation around representation and inclusion, because it feels like it's just, "let's just put this person here in front of the camera" - we'll do all the same things that we've done that this thing that we know is patriarchal and white supremacist does, but we'll just place you, this person, to do it, and what I'm interested in is, how can we, with all our individual subjectivities, actually change the form of film - the language of it, so for a clearer maybe context, Rodney Evans - I believe he's partially blind - and he made a film, and in his film he's using - I haven't seen it but I read about it - he's using the way in which he shoots, the way which he edits, the sound, all of that in order to put his subjectivity as somebody who is partially blind into the film, and I would love to know some things, if you have - I know Ashley has - what are the ways in which you put your subjectivities into the film so that we're not just having this conversation about your identity but we're artists and so how does that identity actually become instrument - like how are those things blended instead of just separate.

Ashley Eakin: Yeah I think as far as filmmaking and being a director it really allows you to be creative to use your own perspective and how people view disabilities - in my trailer you can see that in the beginning you couldn't really see that she has one arm, we shot in a way that there was always something blocking, where you couldn't tell, and then you had that reveal where she does have one arm, and I think that it's really interesting to give the viewer this experience that happens to me and other people that have disabilities that can sometimes feel hidden or not 100% seen, it's this experience that you live where you see what someone sees before and then after, and I love doing that in my filmmaking because it's something - I like the reveal of things and playing with that experience that I have and I think having more filmmakers that can bring - and I often take voice to that type of content - is really important because someone who doesn't have a disability is gonna shoot it completely different than what I shot, and even working with people on my team I had to say, "no, I don't want you to pan down on her arm because that's what someone outside of the film would do." I know that she has one arm and so I don't want you to pan down when we talk about her arm. So that was - it's a consistent conversation that you're having with your crew that just comes in instinctual as a filmmaker but it's really because it's my subjectivity of how I've lived with my bone disease and my experience of what I want the audience to experience while they're watching it. So, I think it allows you to be more creative - I love when films really kind of dig into it - I know the TV show "Special" - he does a lot of that type of stuff in the filmmaking there where he takes you into that perspective and it's really cool and I think it also makes the film scratch - it's a perspective that you haven't seen in film.

Michele Spitz: I actually have a response if I can also, I just want to say something - I know about Rodney, I know about that movie. There is a conversation taking place right now which is a little bit beyond what you're looking at in the sort of general part of audio description. People are beginning to talk about leaving room in their filmmaking and consciously being aware of films specifically about disability and outside of disability but, that the mindset is already in place, so that when we're doing audio description we're not squeezing it in, there's no room to say the visuals that we need to do, and also some are using their own narrative and sort of working their narrative into the film as if they're almost audio describing it themselves - it's a very tough task to accomplish, but there are people that are working towards it. It's a much longer road and I think it's much further out, but it's certainly part of the conversations that are taking place. So, if you're early on in your process and you know what it is, you know an audio description is, and you want to leave room - a little bit of an extra breathing room, for the rest of us to voice it - that's something to consider. But there's lots of things in conversation right now about this particular way you decide to go about this.

Tchaiko Omawale: I want to see it, but when you say that - so it's interesting, when you're talking about it from the technical standpoint of "leave room" and as an artist I'm so curious about what that actual - for somebody who is partially blind, how that actually becomes the creative language, like the pacing because... and that's the kind of thing that I think is exciting when you allow multiple voices in filmmaking, the audience actually gets to receive and experience cinema in vastly different ways.

Michele Spitz: That's exactly right.

Tchaiko Omawale: Yeah.

Shari Bisnaught: Again, I’m the costume designer. [laughter] So, it's a little bit difficult to answer that question because I'm not a DP, I'm not a director, I'm not writing the script, so - and people usually have clothing on already... [laughter]

Michele Spitz: We hope so. [laughter]

Shari Bisnaught: I mean... yeah, it's I think that's a little bit difficult for me to answer but somebody who does have a physical disability, I think if they look banging in what they're wearing [laughter] and it looks like there was a lot of thought put into the way that things are cut and the way it's shaping and fitting their body, then that's all - I just want it to all look good.

Tchaiko Omawale: Okay so then the last one before we open up to Q&A is, this is vision, sort of dream-world, and I'll give an intro for mine, is - I'm not going to name my invisible disability but let's say my pregnancy - my dream world would be that sets are maybe six to eight hours, our days are six to eight hours, so that it's actually possible for people to do things outside or to just have time, that lunch is not thirty minutes but an hour, so that whatever I would need to do to recuperate to be able to work, I would love for health care to be free for everybody so then that's not a consideration of what kind of projects I choose to do, so in your own specificities of things that you know would be absolutely amazing if the world were different - I just think especially in this time right now, it's great to hear visions of - even if it feels like it's unrealistic, what are - does that make sense? What are ideal situations, because we know it's gonna benefit everybody.

Ashley Eakin: I mean the health care thing is really important. I think... something that would allow - going up in this industry as an assistant to directors and producers for ten years, so insurance has not been the easiest to come by, and not until Obamacare was I able to even have a job that didn't offer insurance, and so that was really tricky and I feel like I got lucky with where I was and where my career is taking off, but I would have to deny this job that kind of completely transformed my career because I wouldn't have had insurance and I have to have insurance, I go to the doctor multiple times a year and that is definitely something to not worry about that aspect would be huge because it's still, even now it's just expensive and there's a lot of stuff so that's kind of a big dream thing. Man, I don't know, you said so many good ones.

Tchaiko Omawale: Trying to think of what happens on sets that like—

Ashley Eakin: Yeah I mean - I love women sets - not saying men should be there but I do you think there's something - more women mentors and leaders and producers and just, I think it's important to at least be half. I just worked on a project, it was a female-driven story, I was the only woman on almost the whole entire crew. I would look around and the other people that were women were the costume and the makeup - every single producer, writer, every person who's dealing with the story was a man. And that needs to change and I also think it just weirdly feels like it ties into disability because it is about accepting different types of people to represent these different roles, so I think those are the two things. Let's go this way and I might have another. [overlapping laughter]

Michele Spitz: She's gonna interrupt me in a minute. "I just thought of another one." So, audio description headsets are mandated in most movie theaters except for the ones that cry that they can't afford them, or the movie theater is too old and they can't accommodate it. So, that happened in July of 2018. So, fortunately low vision and blind individuals can go to the theaters and experience movies if the movies have been audio described. So, I'm gonna say on average about 85% but most films are, and there's a percentage that are not - and typically they could be foreign films, they could be documentaries that could be narrated some sort of way. Now, the most bizarre thing about this is that not all movies and content are mandated to be made accessible. So if we have equipment that we can use to experience them, but all content is not required to be, then there's a disconnect. So, in my perfect dream world, all content would be mandated, all networks would have it on every hour - not just eight hours per certain networks, and it would be universal, it wouldn't be a conversation, it would just be mainstream, and that there would be money available to everybody to make this happen because it was mandated, which means money might come in in a different way than we would be expecting it to come in. So that would be my dream world. It would be a fully accessible experience no matter what and everyone had access to everything, nobody was left out - at all.

Shari Bisnaught: I can answer this because I'm currently on a production so I'm just thinking about all of the things that I would want, right now. I'd obviously want it to look like "Best Summer Ever" - fully integrated, in front of the camera behind the camera. I'd love to see more queer people around me. I would love to talk to people that know what I'm dealing with every day. I'd love to see more people of color. I would love to have a buzzer on set that I could press every time someone says something offensive. [laughter] I would just love it. And so you'd just automatically knew that's not right, we're holding you accountable immediately, shape up... Yeah, that's what I want. That's what I want. Yeah. Hour lunches are great, that'd be wonderful so I could eat for 30 minutes and then nap for 30 minutes, but then maybe if productions are only 8 to 10 hours I wouldn't have to nap [Laughter] quality of life would be fine I wouldn't be on set for 15 hours - a day, five days a week, sometimes six days a week. Yeah, it's not really... Yeah, so that's my dream right there.

Tchaiko Omawale: Can I just add something on to that?

Shari Bisnaught: Sure.

Tchaiko Omawale: So if somebody had - I don't know I can't name one but if somebody wanted to be a costume designer and had some sort of disability, what are things that - those are all great for inclusion but what are things that would make it even possible for somebody to be able to pursue that career or perform excellently in that - with costume design.

Shari Bisnaught: I think for any costume designer, we forget about our support, we forget about our team. So we have assistant costume designers, other shoppers, set costumers, etcetra, that really drive that team to be successful. So, I think, just having a really strong support system with you to help you if you cannot physically carry certain things, if you can't be in a fitting and do certain things, because fittings are really intense, and they take a really long time and sometimes you're on the floor, dealing with hems and if you cannot get down to the floor you need somebody who's gonna be able to get down to the floor. So you need to be able to staff correctly with people that are understanding what your limitations are, and that actually make the time for you.

Tatiana Lee: I would say, my dream world, it would be a few different things. So, number one would be, there would never be a question about casting someone with a disability in any role - first of all, because as an actor a lot of times we only get to be in the room when somebody all of a sudden wants to, "oh we should make this person a wheelchair-user - bring in all the wheelchair actors," and that's the only time we get to audition. I never have the opportunity to audition for the role that is the black girl that's the aunt - nothing about a wheelchair - just, or the best friend. So that's number one, that it shouldn't matter about their disability or role that's made for a person with a disability, they should just be auditioned, number one - that would be my number one. And then, when you do include disability, don't think you just included someone with a disability and then you're good, so you have that one person. There needs to be more. People with disabilities, we make up 20% of the population, and it does not reflect what media is. We only make up about a little more than 2% in mass media of what you see. 20%, 2% - that's a huge gap. So, have a few people, and sometimes you only go for the white girl in the wheelchair, so a lot of times, I'm not even thought about because I also have that intersection of being black and being a woman and also being a wheelchair-user so, I have all these check marks against me that make it a lot harder. And another thing would be, I would do away with inspiration porn. [laughter] Have to. And, does everybody know what inspiration porn is? [no's from the audience]

Michele Spitz: You're gonna now. [laughter]

Tatiana Lee: Okay, so inspiration porn... are stories that are basically, the focus is on the disability and the goal is to make you feel better about yourself. So, like when you see that person and they tell that story, "oh my gosh, she dressed so pretty and she was just so amazing" or if you hear about those prom stories where somebody took somebody with Down syndrome to the prom, those are inspiration porn stories, and it's not about the autonomy of the person with a disability being a whole 360 person, it's solely focused on their disability and the goal is, because you feel better about yourself, "oh at least I don't have to deal with all of that," that's inspiration porn. I want to see characters that are three-dimensional, have livelihoods, have jobs, have careers, have relationships, have husbands, have wives, and all of those things that we are as the disability community because, they don't portray us in the way that we really live our lives and that needs to be told, which is why I think it's so important to have people with disabilities behind the scenes as well. Like Ashley doing her film, that's amazing. She's telling it the way a person with a disability would want their story to be told, because she's assisting with making that happen or telling the story herself. We're literally having to tell our own stories because no one is really getting it right. So those are some of my dream scenarios that I can think about right now. And more accessibility, just across the board on everything visual, hearing impaired, mobility, everything.

Tchaiko Omawale: I have an add-on question to that.

Tatiana Lee: Okay.

Tchaiko Omawale: Are there casting directors or institutions that you can let us all know about who are sort of doing this right - and if they're not please also say none of them.

Tatiana Lee: So, I feel some productions have done a great job: ABC Disney has been doing a really really great job. NBC has been doing a really great job with a lot of the shows they've been doing... "New Amsterdam," "The Good Doctor," "Grey's Anatomy"... they're so great shows. Netflix has been doing a great job

Tchaiko Omawale: Do you mean content, story-wise, or literally how they're casting?

Tatiana Lee: How they're casting, yes. How they're casting because they're using people with disabilities authentically, that's another huge thing - stop casting people who don't have disabilities to play a role to have disability. That's another thing, that's a huge smack in the face to trained actors with disabilities, when you're casting someone who does not have that disability and they're like "I didn't even get auditioned." So, there are productions that are doing a really really great job and, like I said Netflix, with the show like "Special" that Ryan did and then "Healing Powers of Dude" which actually, RespectAbility - we helped assist in shaping this one character, she's a Asian girl in a wheelchair, and it's amazing show, it's about just a bunch of teenagers hanging out and having fun and it had nothing to do with her disability, she was just this fun, badass friend that just - she was fearless and amazing and... that's just it. It wasn't about her disability. So things like that. So there are some shows and different things like that, but we still have a long, long way to go.

Michele Spitz: Can I interject for one minute? There's a - RespectAbility of course is connected, I think it's KMR, am I right about that?

Tatiana Lee: Yes, I was gonna say - yes. KMR.

Michele Spitz: Gail Williamson is - oh, I'm sorry - Gail Williamson is an agent for actors with disabilities and she does extraordinary work, she's been doing it for a very long time.

Tatiana Lee: I’m actually one of her clients.

Michele Spitz: So I think that she's a person to look to for talent, most certainly, she's been doing it longer than anybody else.

Tatiana Lee: She has over four or five hundred clients and they're all trained actors with different various disabilities from different backgrounds and are ready to work.

Nasreen Alkhateeb: That's amazing.

Audience Member: Who is this?

Michele Spitz: KMR.

Tatiana Lee: KMR. Her name is Gail Williamson, from KMR.

Nasreen Alkhateeb: So I'd love to open it up to the audience.