>> Lesley Hennen: Hello everyone! Thank you so much for joining us today! My name is Lesley Hennen. My pronouns are she her. And just a bit of a visual description: I am a white woman with brown hair. I'm wearing glasses and a dark green sweater. And behind me I have a RespectAbility banner on a black background with white and yellow letters. And we are so excited to be here today. As you all know, I work for RespectAbility, a disability-led nonprofit that fights stigmas and advances opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. We are so excited to partner with the Center for Scholars and Storytellers at UCLA on their newest study. As we all know, what we see on screen ultimately affects the way we experience daily life, which is why it is so important for us to see not only more representation of disabled people on screen, but also to ensure that the representation is accurate authentic and intersectional, since disability is an identity that cuts across all communities, regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, and all other underrepresented identities. The research conducted by the Center for Scholars and Storytellers explores an important topic of how disabled people feel about the way we are currently represented on screen. And we are so excited to share those results of -- those findings with you all today. So with that I will hand things over to my RespectAbility colleague, Tatiana Lee, who will be moderating the conversation today. She will introduce herself and the rest of our panelists.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much Lesley for the amazing introduction. Again, my name is Tatiana Lee. I'm the Senior Associate of Entertainment and Media here at RespectAbility. My pronouns are she and her, and I'm a brown-skinned black -- disabled black woman with kinky curly hair which is in a bun, and I'm wearing a brown top and a black jacket with a yellow and black RespectAbility banner behind me. While entertainment professionals across all platforms are increasingly working to become more inclusive of all underrepresented communities, oftentimes disability is forgotten about. And we're often forgot about in those conversations. However, opening the umbrella of inclusion of the one in five people with disabilities in the US is the right thing to do, as well as an economically smart thing to do, given that -- according to Nielsen the disability market, including people with their families and friends, is valued at over one trillion dollars. Additionally, according to GLAAD, just 3.5 percent of characters in broadcast scripted series had a disability in 2021 season. A lot of the -- representation that exists is misleading though. Almost all patrols of people with disabilities in the media are white men, but disability impacts all. Disabled people come from all communities including black, AAPI, hispanic, Latinx, indigenous, LGBTQ and other underrepresented communities. The success of films like CODA, Peanut Butter Falcon, Black Panther, Crazy Rich Asians show that diversity wins at the end of the day. Yet even still, there is room for more intersectional representation in these success stories. As proven in the findings in the stories, audiences are ready and waiting for more quality content that they feel accurately represents them in their nuanced life experience. To highlight the findings of this study, we will talk to experts in these topics which -- I will let them introduce themselves. First we have Maira Karan, who will lead us through this study. She is a fifth year PhD candidate -- and a junior fellow at the Center for Scholars and Storytellers. Amanda Aguero, actress, screenwriter, physical production specialist, and 2021 alum of RespectAbility's Lab for entertainment professionals with disabilities. And -- Diane J Wright, screenwriter, DEI and accessibility content consultant, and disability advocate. Thank you so much I will take it over to them. Maira, can you please introduce yourself and then Amanda and Diane respectively.

>> Maira Karan: Hi everyone my name is Maira Karan, and I'm a fifth year PhD candidate at UCLA. I'm also a junior fellow at the Center for Scholars and Storytellers. I'm an Indian-American woman, I am right now located at UCLA. I'm wearing a green top and I have a green background behind me, and I'm very excited to be here.

>> Amanda Aguero: Hi, my name is Amanda. My pronouns are she her and hers. I'm a mixed ethnicity woman. I have brown skin with dark brown hair, I'm wearing a brown shirt, and I'm sitting in front of my background which is a collection of movie posters, and a small library. And my disability is a limb difference of my left arm.

>> Diane J. Wright: Hello, there we are. I'm Diane J Wright. I am -- my pronouns are she and her. Today I am -- well I'm always a biracial black woman. Today I'm wearing a gray shirt, a necklace -- what am I wearing? I have light colored hair and I have a background of a sort of northern lights tree calming thing going on. I'm a creative consultant, which means that I use the abilities conferred upon me by my disability to give producers and screenwriters the insights into their projects that they can't otherwise have. So that is what I do.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you, thank you so much all for introducing yourselves. So I figure we will jump right into it. Maira, do you want to take it away?

>> Maira Karan: Yeah definitely. So I'm gonna go ahead and share my screen which has some slides that depict, you know, some of the findings from the report, which you all can -- can hopefully get a hold of so this is just a cover of the great report that we just released today. It's titled "Disabled U.S. Audience Perceptions of Representation On Screen." And this can be found on both the Center for Scholars and Storytellers website, as well as RespectAbility's website. So I'm just going to jump right into it. What we did in this study was we surveyed participants and we took a sub-sample of participants who identified as disabled. So they self-reported that they had a disability. We're not sure exactly what the disabilities were, but we know that they identified as having a disability. And one of the questions that we asked participants to respond to was "do you feel as though the facets of your identity that matter most to you are accurately represented in the TV and media content that you consume on a regular basis?" And so what we found in the overall sample -- the overall sample of individuals who identified as disabled, which was a little over 260 individuals, is that 59 percent with one or more disabilities feel as though their identity is well represented in the media content that they regularly consume. And so what you see here on this graph in this sort of turquoise color is the percentage of people who felt well represented on screen, while this darker blue graph or this darker blue bar represents those who do not feel well represented. And that was at about 40 percent. But when we looked further into the findings and we actually looked at different moderators of this question, we found that there was a difference in terms of who is actually feeling represented in this group. And what you see here depicted on the right hand side is the gender breakdown. We have men women and individuals with other genders represented here. And what we see is that men in particular are actually the ones who are feeling quite well represented on screen, with over 75 percent -- in particular 76.7 percent of men who feel very -- who are feeling well represented on screen. But when you -- when you're looking at the women, we found that the opposite result. So we saw that woman -- in particular 41.6 percent of women -- those are -- that was a smaller number of individuals who were feeling well represented. And it was actually a little under 60 percent of women who were feeling as though they are not being well represented on screen. So as you can see, this finding sort of shows us that there are gender differences in those who are feeling well represented on screen within our disabled sample in the study. Moving on to the next research question that we highlight in the report. We asked participants: "Do you feel as though accurate representation of your identity on TV and in the media has increased, decreased or stayed the same over the past one to two years?" We really wanted to get a sense of do people feel as though there has been change in terms of their representation on screen. And the findings I'm showing here are for the responses of people who talked about feeling as though their representation has stayed the same. We found that the majority of our sample that identified with a disability feels as though their representation hasn't really changed on screen, it stayed the same. So we saw that with about 47 percent of the sample. And then again, we looked at the gender breakdown. This is where we saw, like, more striking differences. We found that it was really women and individuals of other genders who are feeling as though their representation has really not changed. And we don't -- we don't actually show this in the report, but in our findings we found that men actually felt as though their representation on screen has increased over the past one to two years. So it was very different from what we're seeing with the other two -- gender groups that we have grouped here. And then lastly we looked at this other research question which is "which do you value more: the amount or otherwise the quantity of TV content that represents your identity, or the manner in which TV content represents your identity?" So really getting at quality versus quantity. And in the overall sample, we saw that it was about the same, in terms of the disabled sample, wanting both quality content and quantity. So higher numbers of, you know, shows and content that's representing those with a disability. But when we looked at the gender breakdown, again, we saw this really interesting finding where it was really men who were wanting to see more quantity, so see more just, you know, numerical representation on screen so about 68 percent are -- sorry, it was -- yeah, about 68 percent of men really wanted to see more quantity. But with women, they actually wanted to see more quality representation, as opposed to quantity. So we see here that there's really a difference. And then again we also saw with the -- and with the other genders, so those who did not identify as men or as women, they also really wanted to see quantity representation on screen as opposed to quality. So really these findings highlight that there are very stark gender differences, at least in this initial take from our research. Something to note about this work is that it's, you know, we can't draw any correlation -- any causational conclusions about this work. These are all correlations, meaning that we see that these things are related to each other, but we can't necessarily say that one is causing the other. And so we want to interpret these findings with a little bit of caution. But something to note is that this is really an area of research that needs more work. You know, the amount of research that's out there on this topic in terms of understanding what disabled audiences want to see on screen - it's very scarce. And so we're really hoping that this report is sort of the jumping point for other research organizations and content creators to really start listening to disabled audience members and what they want to see on screen. So with that, I'm going to stop sharing my screen. But these are the findings in the report, and so hopefully everyone gets a chance to read them and sort of, you know, digest the information. But I look forward to talking about it more with everyone here today.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much. Those were interesting findings and lots to dig into. So I wanted to start with a question for you though, because you talked about how, you know, this is just kind of scratching the surface and we need to dig deeper into more. And so what do you think other people that are doing research and studies -- because there's so many organizations and so many different outlets doing really great studies, even now more than ever with so many talks of representation in media and, you know, Hollywood having this this racial reckoning, and, you know, so much. What does this mean for talking more about intersectionality when, you know, folks are having these conversations within their respective studios or production companies?

>> Maira Karan: Yeah, like you said, this work really scratches the surface. But I think the hope really is that content creators really work with organizations and individuals who are actually having these experiences every day, and ensure that they're actually representing these experiences in an accurate way. And intersectionality is just such an important component, because we know that, you know, disability does not choose race or gender. It affects everybody, right? And so it's so important to be able to acknowledge a wide variety of stories, a wide variety of disabilities, and make sure that you're actually doing it the justice that it deserves, and you're representing people, their stories, their struggles in a way that is going to resonate with the audiences that are trying to take in that content or consume that information.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, thank you so much. So I have another question for you, and as I ask this question, I would love for our other panelists to join us so we can continue to engage in this conversation. But what do you think is the hesitancy for a lot of people to not include disability within a diversity? You know we -- in a lot of our trainings, we always say, you know, disability is d in diversity, and, you know, things like that. What do you think is a lot of people's hesitancy -- hesitancy? Sorry, I can't get my words out. Do you think it's lack of awareness or -- what are some of your thoughts?

>> Maira Karan: I think lack of awareness is definitely one thing. I think another thing is people are just, I think, really afraid of offending individuals, right? And so again, I just go back to working with the people who have these lived experiences to make sure you're doing justice to their stories and you're not making stereotypes, you're not working off of tropes, like, really getting your hands deep into the community and understanding their stories, I think is just so important to be able to actually, like, create content that is authentically representative and inclusive of individuals with, like, a wide range of disabilities.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, thank you so much. I want to pose this question to our fabulous panelists, Amanda and Diane. And this is something that I know all three of us, and even Maira, have had conversations about intersectionality. What do you think people -- need to know, and what are some factors to think about in terms of representing intersectionality on the screen? And any of you can take that.

>> Amanda Aguero: Cool. Regarding intersectionality, it's something that, like, I personally have just begun to realize the importance of, especially, like, in my own life. I know that I've always been informed by, like, my heritage and my -- I mean, it sounds kind of -- not horrible to say, but it sounds I guess pessimistic to say -- informed by my ethnicity and my disability. But to find how all of those kind of mesh into who I am, I think that is what is important for, like, the film industry as a whole and creatives as a whole to embrace about people. And it's something that I think that there's a reservation about doing, especially as far as disabilities are concerned. But what's -- what I would encourage people to think of is that they're already doing it, like, with the characters that they're representing on screen, they're bringing that person's history, that person's present, and what they hope for their future. And essentially it's going to be the same for us -- those with disabilities. And so it's really not too far out of the wheelhouse from what they're currently doing.

>> Tatiana Lee: Exactly, I agree. I agree. It's like, you're already doing that, it's -- sometimes just a different -- another layer or a different response into how you respond to it. And I was on another panel or having a conversation, I forget, one or the other, but some -- oh, I was talking about dating. And oh, that's what it was. I was talking about dating and I said, yes, you have movies and, you know, you can have a movie with a black woman, you know, getting a love interest and she walks and bumps up into this van and she's like, "oh my gosh you're gorgeous, want to go on a date?" And stuff like that. And then I said -- but I was like you know, it's gonna look similar, but the response may be a little different, but let's talk about that. You have to show those kind of things. You know, I'm not gonna be able to bump into a guy in my wheelchair and be like "hey, want to go on a date?" Because I was like, his response is going to be different. His response instead of "yes" is going to be "why are you in a wheelchair? What happened to you?" And it's like, that's kind of just it -- but it's like, let's have the opportunity to unpack what that looks like, and it's like, that's okay to have those conversations. It's not something that we need to be squeamish about, like, not talk about. These are the conversations that aren't being had that need to be had. And it's like, we're gonna have to have them in film and TV at some point, so. [Laughs]

>> Amanda Aguero: Absolutely.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah I don't know if -- Diane, if you had anything you wanted to add or say in terms of intersectionality and representation, especially in your work as a DEI consultant.

>> Diane J. Wright: Absolutely. As an advocate, I am in touch with thousands and thousands of invisibly disabled autistic people. and for me especially as a person of color -- to be invisibly disabled and a person of color and a woman -- there are none of us on screen, and the output of that is that we may not even recognize ourselves in real life. So when you think about autistic characters, they are almost unilaterally -- almost, getting a little better -- white boys and men, and, you know, below 35 generally as most entertainment is. And if you don't see anybody like you or no one's even talking about anyone like you, you might not know that how you're living your life on the inside is very different from what you're seeing on screen and how everyone else around you is living their lives. I hear this story every single day. People don't know that they're disabled because they have no way to see other people like them. And then when you hear the discourse around that particular disability, it has nothing to do with you. So I see it.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah I agree. So let's talk about our next topic: quality versus quantity. And I think that is very important, because we have seen a slight uptick in disability representation as a whole. But again, they're typically of cisgender white men. And so talking about, you know, representation and having it and it not being more, you know, quantity but then also being quality, and I think that's where folks like yourselves come in to be able to help make sure that we're thinking about that and doing it accurately. And that's where hiring disabled people to be a part of every part of the, you know, film and TV making process is so important. So what are some of your thoughts -- either of you -- what can content creators do to balance quality over quantity, or quality versus quantity of disability representation?

>> Diane J. Wright: Well you said it. Ask us, include us, hire us, not to go on about just autism alone, but for all disabilities, what we're seeing in our media now is the observed reality. It's what other people see when looking at us. It's not our internal lives, it's not our experiences -- our supposed experience, or how you feel about us, which is valid but it's also not the whole picture. So when we're hired from the beginning of a project, or even just consulting when you're thinking of a project, you can find out what you're missing, you can find out the other perspectives that make things richer and more interesting and speak to that 25 percent -- well it's 26 -- at last count -- percent of the U.S. audience and that's just the people who've reported on a form [laughs] disabled, so that's not even everyone else.

>> Tatiana Lee: Exactly, exactly. Amanda did you have anything to add?

>> Amanda Aguero: Yeah, so part of the whole inclusivity piece to media, I think, is you don't have to take a huge bite out of the issue in order to start addressing it. So I think a lot of creatives right now are kind of leaning more towards the ideal of in order to include a person with a disability you have to specifically write them into your script or, like, establish their story. Where, like, I've gone into auditions for an extra, or just shown up on set as a PA and they're looking for extras and I'll say, like, I'm ready, I can go in, what do you need me to do? And then I'll be turned down because they're like, "wait, but we don't have a backstory for your arm. We don't want the audience to get confused." And it's like I'm, like, grocery store shopper number 13. I don't think it's a huge issue. So it's like, creatives I think -- there's -- you want to control everything in your project, which is fair. But also like have that flexibility to not hang on super tightly to, you know, something that could address the disability issue in being represented, like being extra number whatever in the grocery store. Like, have the flexibility to say, you know, this is a normal experience, like, if I were to go to the grocery store, I'll run into like 10 people with a disability. And so just kind of the flexibility to see where we fit into their existing stories as well.

>> Diane J. Wright: The big hurdle is -- like the elephant in the room is that no one wants to talk about the stigma and the shame and the -- this is the way society feels about us, but the way we feel about us are we're just people [chuckles]. So it takes -- a special kind of producer, I guess, to push through that, because we don't need everything to be about it. We're just people! I don't need a backstory for your arm, Amanda! [Laughs] That's hilarious though. But yeah, we can be cast in any role, the story does not need to be centered on us or our disability. The scene does not need to be. We can just be walking through, or we can have a leading role, and you just happen to be whatever the disability is. That is what changes the world and that is what is representative. That's how we live.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah. I agree. I agree. I have this conversation a lot, and one of the things that I say is, you know -- I'm an aunt, I'm a daughter, I'm a best friend, I am a co-worker, I'm, you know, people here to listen to -- and all of those things have nothing to do with my disability. And the only time I'm thinking about my disability is when I'm up against accessibility, and you bring it up for me. Other than that, I'm not thinking about my disability, so yes, having this conversation of, oh, you have to have this backstory, and I need to know why you're in a wheelchair and, you know, why do you want to date, and shouldn't you be thinking about your health, and all these other things. And it's like, I've literally had someone tell me that. It's like, oh no, you shouldn't be worried about fashion or dating. You should be worried about your health. It's like excuse you, why can't I worry -- be worried about all the above? [Laughs] And it's like having those conversations so that people -- to your point, both of your points -- is that, you know, we're seeing the media and the way we see ourselves, we're seeing it from the way the non-disabled world wants to see us, or how they view us, which is typically through the lens of inspiration porn. And it's like, we are not your inspiration porn! Please stop. [laughs] And can we just see our stories so that we can see ourselves represented? Because the future generation -- one of the things that I started this work is, I said, I do not want the future disabled women of color to grow up dealing with all of the struggles, and the shame, and the obstacles that I dealt with in my life - from school, to education, to friendships. Again, dating -- all of those things are very very, you know, nuanced things that it's -- the experience is different. And so I want to see that reflected, so that the next generation doesn't have to grow up feeling ashamed of who they are, because you should not be ashamed for the fact that you have a limb difference, or that you use a wheelchair, or that you are neurodiverse. And, you know, all of those things. We should never feel shame for that, and I think that's important to be able to show that. So I went on a tangent, apologies. [Laughs]

>> Diane J. Wright: We're calling for media to reflect social change, the same change that, years ago, was for the LGBT community, or years before that it was for women and African-Americans, and just, like, we've come through this over and over and over. And we need to keep going for the disabled community.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes. And that leads us to kind of the conversation of authenticity. And I think this is important, and actually we have some questions which I'm going to get to, but one of the questions is on authenticity, and someone asked a question about authentic casting, which is something that we all are constantly, constantly advocating for. But I have a question: what makes on-screen disability representation authentic, and how can content creators best represent that authenticity? We've talked about, you know, hiring people at various levels. And then I don't know if you can touch a little bit on maybe, you know, thinking about authentic casting and other things that folks should be thinking about.

>> Amanda Aguero: Yeah, I can touch on this a little bit. So authenticity to me means, like, you're -- you're approaching the story from the perspective of the people who you're telling it for. So like, if someone were making a story about someone with a limb difference, they would ideally consult someone who has a limb difference when developing the script. But then also, I get the the draw of hiring an A-list star to play the person with the limb difference and then green screening it out in everything that Hollywood has ever done, but I think that there's a time and a place for bold moves. So hire that unknown, aka me, to play your star in your movie of the person with the limb difference, because society is hungry for that. Like, we've been getting kind of fed the same food over and over and over again and it's like, yeah, it's great it's -- I'm not gonna complain about it because it's great content and great entertainment, but also, like, ready for a change, like, ready for authenticity to be shown. And then I think through that we're going to see a huge change in the entertainment industry and ultimately, I think, in society as well.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes I agree. And, you know, another thing is you can still put that A-list actor in there. You just put them in a different role that's opposite that newcomer. I mean, you see other groups do that for underrepresented actors all the time and it always says "introducing." I mean, and a great example of that -- which leads me to my next question was -- one of my favorite examples, although this example is still a cisgender white man, but Peanut Butter Falcon was a great example of how that can be done. It was Zach Gottsagen was in this role No one knew who he was but then you put him opposite Shia LaBeouf. And I can't remember her name -- I can't remember her name. [snaps fingers] I can't remember her name. Never mind, but she's another really huge name actor! [laughs] Sorry, it's after five o'clock on a Wednesday. Dakota Johnson, thank you! Dakota Johnson. And the movie did great! And it's like, you still got to do this authentic character and it was told through that experience. It was such a beautifully done movie. And I was like that is a good example of best practice. But again, we need to go further and think more about intersectionality. But with that, my question that I wanted to pose to you all is what are some shows and movies or characters that stand out for their authentic representation? So I know Peanut Butter Falcon is one. What are some other ones that are some of your guys favorites? And Maira, if you want to chime in on some of your favorites, please, I would love to hear your thoughts.

>> Diane J. Wright: I can share that the talk in the community has been in the last couple years, because everything has really been white men boys, even though these characters are still white, the Everything's Gonna Be Okay, that series -- it lasted two seasons and was canceled. But it was -- it had autistic characters, it was played by autistic actors, and it was about life, not about the tragedy of the families with autistic family members in them, which is pretty much everything else. So that's -- that's definitely progress and there are other characters. I know [unintelligible] there's a British series that has an autistic actress who's black, sorry, non-binary, actress -- actor, sorry about that. I can't really think of others though, that's the thing --

>> Tatiana Lee: It's five o'clock on a Wednesday so --

>> Diane J Wright: No, not that I can't think of, I didn't mean that. I mean that there aren't that -- there aren't others.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah.

>> Diane J. Wright: One or two coded characters, right, where we can read into the fact that oh, this is an autistic person. But that's it.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah. Another good example for me, again a cisgender white male, but Special. I thought Special was really great. It was told through the story of, you know, someone who has cerebral palsy and is also gay and it was played by Ryan, who also, you know, played himself in that film, and you know, he's still a cisgender white man, but he told the story of, you know, having CP and also being gay which -- is, you know, touching on intersectionality. And I think it's so important. Yes! Jillian Mercado in the L Word Generation Q, which has been really really great, even this season she's, you know, dealing with, you know, navigating having intimacy, which is so important to see. We don't see disabled women, especially disabled women of color, being intimate. and so generation -- The L Word Generation Q has been really really great for that representation. And there's a few other things. Netflix has been doing a little well, so has Disney, but again, there's still so much more work to be done.

>> Maira Karan: Yeah and your comment too about, like you know, showing disabled characters being intimate. Like for me, I think when I saw Steve Way on Ramy, like that -- that to me -- it felt so authentic and real. And again like, not an intersectional character, so to speak, right? But like, it -- it just felt like, you know, it didn't feel like inspiration porn. It really felt like he was being his authentic self. But again like, we want to see these characters be, like, at the center of the show, not just the side character or the side friend. But I do think nonetheless like Ramy and the show did a great job about showing -- Steve's struggles with -- intimacy, for example, right? Like, kind of in a comedic way but still at least touched upon it, which I think a lot of shows just, like you said, they ignore it completely.

>> Tatiana Lee: Exactly exactly. So I'm gonna -- oh Diane, did you have something you want to add? Go for it!

>> Diane J. Wright: I was just thinking that there are -- there have been shows dealing with mental health issues more and more recently, which is great, because mental health issues still falls under disability. However mostly not people of color, and not women. Mostly.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah. And then I think a lot of people don't realize that mental health is classified, you know, as a disability. If it, you know, substantially limits one or more major life activities, that is, you know, a disability and so -- and the most prevalent disability that's out there is anxiety. And then you think about now in our age of, you know, being in a pandemic and dealing with COVID, people that are having long COVID, and, you know -- to your point Diane, the number of people with disabilities is so underreported and going up as we speak as people are, you know, contracting COVID. And so thinking about that.

>> Diane J. Wright: Even just using the word disability in association with storylines about anxiety or COVID or any of that, even just making that connection so that it's more normalized goes a long way.

>> Tatiana Lee: I agree, I agree. So we have some questions, and I figured I would dive into one of them. Someone says how do you write diverse -- how do you write diversity powerfully without it being too hit on the nose or too preachy? Do you all have any thoughts on there from a consultant or, you know, expert in this space?

>> Amanda Aguero: Sure, so someone posted in the chat too about -- what is inspiration porn kind of thing, and to me, like, inspiration porn is something where, like, a character with a disability on screen does something and you go oh, wow, like, in spite of this they accomplished this, just wow. And it makes you as the audience feel empowered and inspired. But for people with that disability or just with a disability, it kind of just makes you feel -- there's just something that makes me personally feel, like, unsettled and icky about, like --

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah.

>> Amanda Aguero: So I think the key to avoiding that is to just write down your character in what they're doing. Don't have their disability be the focus of the character, because then that's how you kind of really breach into the inspiration porn zone. But just write about their humanity first, and let their disability just kind of play out. You don't have to specify anything about it.

>> Tatiana Lee: Exactly exactly. And the official definition of when you talk about inspiration porn: it's when a character is one-dimensional and is solely there to exist to warm the hearts of non-disabled people. So when you see those projects where, to Amanda's point, where, you know, they're just there and, you know, the non-disabled person is helping them, or they're there and, you know, you're looking at them and saying my life is so much better than that disabled person, because they have it so much worse. When you think about it in that way, those type of story lines are inspiration porn. And to Amanda's point, one of the things that you do is strip away the disability. If you never even mentioned that that person have a disability, does their storyline or does their character still make sense to be in this arc? Or are they there to only move the narrative of the non-disabled person? Then more than likely you're falling into inspiration porn. So thinking about that as you're working on your characters, things like that. We are not there to move the plot along for non-disabled people to be the savior. We are not there to just, you know, be worried about our disability. [Laughs]

>> Diane J. Wright: Well look, we're not reinventing anything here. I often just point people to past movements, is one way to look at it, but if you're curious or wondering how to treat disabled characters, look to how black characters have been treated. Look to how women have been treated. Like, these stories, we've -- I've said this before, but we've come through this, like, before, time and time again. And the answer is usually including people in meaningful numbers. Not one person in the writing room or consulting one person one time on one script in an entire series. Meaningfully include people, because they will give you that perspective that deepens the storyline and deepens the characters and rounds out the entire experience of that character, rather than just being that one observed token that's pushing the plot point that week.

>> Tatiana Lee: Exactly. I agree. We have a question and I'm gonna pose this to Maira. Maira, someone in the comments asked a question. They said they are working on a specific study on representation for a specific disability - narcolepsy in this case - and they said curious from your perspective on using research to get Hollywood and content creators to care and increase representation. Because they, to their point, they think that their study is just going to sit on a research shelf and not be used. So what are some thoughts that you have on this and how they can use that data to then drive content creators in Hollywood to listen?

>> Maira Karan: Yeah that's a great question and great point, and I feel like exactly what we're trying to do at the Center for Scholars and Storytellers. You know, we really are trying to bridge the gap between research and Hollywood to really show, through data visualization, through numbers that, like, people care about these issues and they're paying attention to them. And so I think, you know, the more that you can take your research and make a business case, so to speak, show, like, you know, how do they lose audience members? Are they losing money at the box office, for example? Like, giving them tangible reasons as to why they should care from a business perspective, although it's kind of icky, I think is one way of getting content creators to really pay attention, and to say, hey, we actually need to consider this, because there might be money or something else on the line here. And I think another point too is really, again, to partner with these organizations that are doing the work and so that was a big motivation of us partnering with all of you at RespectAbility to make sure that the research that we're doing is well-informed, well-meaning, well-intentioned, and that we're really reaching the audiences that we want to be reaching.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much. Another question we have. They said they are a disabled filmmaker and they wanted to know what is some advice you have for them and what they can do beyond their own films or even their own films and beyond to make a difference in Hollywood in terms of representation? I don't know if Amanda or Diane, if you had any thoughts.

>> Diane J. Wright: I think just being a disabled filmmaker is doing the work, because you're not just making your film, but you're showing up at producers' doorsteps and you're showing up at funding bodies and studios and you're making those business connections that are needed to get your film in the world, aware that you need that. In other words, you're saying there's money out there, there's an audience out there, connect me. And just the action of getting your film into people's eyeballs, in one way or another, keeps pushing that message that there are people out there who want to see it.

>> Amanda Aguero: Yeah and I'll say, to kind of tie it in with one of the comments in the chat about accessibility, and, like, a lot of the content with characters with disabilities being on Netflix and like Apple TV, a lot of people don't have that. And so I think a good avenue is honestly, like, YouTube and Vimeo, which is kind of a bummer because rarely does that, like, pay necessarily, but I think -- and this is just my perspective -- your reward, at least in the beginning of this battle for inclusivity, the reward is getting the content out there. And so like, a couple of my good friends that I rock climb with who have limb differences as well, they're part of this series on YouTube, I think it's called Reel Rock, r-e-e-l Rock, and they do specials on climbers with disabilities. And that has gained a lot of traction and it's getting our stories out there and told. And kind of, it's been really cool to watch the development of that in the athletic world, because we just had our para-climbing world competition, and there was a huge turnout, like, in spite of COVID, and all of these, you know, travel blocks that were raised. And we still had teams from all over the world show up for this, and documentaries were being filmed, like, on site. And so we're creating this appetite for this type of content and it's really exciting.

>> Diane J. Wright: Yeah, we just got to keep doing what we do for ourselves, yeah. That's hard enough! [laughs]

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. So we have another question. Someone said and I was like -- in my opinion based on this, I was like, we talked a little about inspiration porn. But then someone says what are some negative cliches that you believe Hollywood needs to curtail or do a better job at curtailing. I like this question. We touched on inspiration porn, which in my opinion is the biggest. But what are some other ones if you all want to touch on them? I know I have a few, but I would love to hear what you guys have to say.

>> Diane J. Wright: Well in my community it's the trope of the aggrieved parent, you know? It's always about, like, hashtags and the family, it's never -- about, it's never centering -- even if it is about autistic child, it's never centering the child's experience. It's about the child and their families. So to take that perspective and focus it on the person you're actually making the film about [laughs] would be a nice thing to -- start doing, and stop doing the other.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah.

>> Diane J. Wright: And disability in general just being the tragedy, like that -- just the overarching --

>> Tatiana Lee: The tragedy, the burden, to your point. And even with that centering the family, and how it's, you know, or the person that's dealing with it and how it's -- basically centering the non-disabled person and from that perspective, and it's like, no, center the reality of what it's like internally for said disabled person. [Laughs]

>> Diane J. Wright: To be clear those stories -- there's nothing wrong with telling those stories. The problem comes is that we are only telling those stories. So just like intersectionality in general, we don't only speak of one group, like, it isn't -- we need to look at the spectrum of humanity and bring that to screen.

>> Maira Karan: Yeah, I totally agree with that and I feel like, really, it's just about telling those authentic stories, right? Because individuals with disabilities, it's not like their whole life surrounds around dealing with that disability per se, right? Like, everyone leads very rich multi-faceted lives. And so like, I loved what Diane said earlier about Amanda which is like, we don't need the back story, right? Like -- and when you're walking down the street and you're meeting someone, like, we don't know the backstory behind why, you know, they may be a certain way, and we never get that backstory because that's just how life is. And I think the more that we treat these circumstances as just being a part of life, and -- I don't necessarily like the word normal, though, like, I can't think of a better word in the current moment. But just treating it like any other day and any other story, I think, is really important. And like Diane said, it's not to say that telling those stories that talk about, you know, the struggles that might go behind having a disability aren't important. But those shouldn't be the only stories that are told.

>> Amanda Aguero: Yeah, and kind of feeding off of what Diane was saying too about how we're telling the stories of, like, the families reacting to -- and it puts the disability in such a negative context, like, it almost feels like, I mean for lack of a better word, like a curse brought on this family of, like, they have to deal with this now, on top of how hard life is already. And like, I just, maybe it's because Halloween is right around the corner, but I kept thinking of Harry Potter and how, like, a lot of these kids, like, their parents were -- those who were not witches and wizards were ashamed of their kids abilities. And then you have little Hermione Granger who's -- her parents are proud of that and I was so blessed to be in that, like, Hermione Granger household where my parents embraced my disability. And -- when we would see a trope on screen -- I can't think of any characters right off the bat that were limb difference. But like, if we saw a character with some sort of disability that was portrayed negatively, they would pull me aside and be, like, how did you feel about that? Like, is there anything we could talk about or just, like, kind of be super supportive of me and my abilities. And that was super refreshing, and something I wish society as a whole would do more. Because it's not about -- suppressing the disability in the conversation, it's about embracing that conversation and saying, like, what did this potentially do wrong, if that made you feel kind of off about that performance or that story. Like, what can we do better? Which is where conversations like this are imperative.

>> Tatiana Lee: I agree. So one person has a question where they asked about getting discouraged when it comes to seeing stereotypes and being turned down for opportunities, and you know what do you do that? And the first thing I thought about was advocacy burnout. So what do you do to not get discouraged as you continue to do the work that you do in your advocacy work in entertainment? I would love to hear some of your thoughts. [Laughter] You're like, I'll get back to you when I figure it out!

>> Diane J. Wright: Well I think discouragement is part of -- every day because we are talking about societal change, and so many people are completely unaware that this change is even needed or happening. So it is a huge huge mountain to climb. However I try to focus on the wins. I try to focus on when people see themselves -- and finally do see themselves represented, the joy and that -- that feeling of being part of something and being included and seen and valued is immeasurable. So I try to hold on to that. And also just to my personal -- how I feel about me in my life, right, I try to hold on to the goodness of what my own disability brings me, and the rich world that I built with others of varying disability -- like, the world is ending this binary way to look at things right? This good and bad, this gay, this straight, that's like all of this stuff, this gender, male and female, nothing else, so this is just another evolution that we -- in thinking that we're coming out of this disabled people being these others over here. We're not others over in some tragic little bucket, like, we are in every role, in every part of society, in every family, in every business, like absolutely everywhere. And I hold on to that.

>> Amanda Aguero: Yeah, and I recently went through like the lowest burnout period that I've ever experienced with my journey in the industry, recently, and I grew up with like -- an athletic background, so like all in, like team sports and basketball and that sort of thing. And my coaches used to just drill into me that, like, when you think you're about to give up or when you think you can't go any further, like, take one more step. Go just a little bit farther than you think you can go. And for me, honestly, that's what this RespectAbility lab series was for me this summer. I had, like, negative five percent energy left in my tank from hustling for my roles and my place in this industry. And I literally like shot up a prayer, and was like, I'm gonna apply to RespectAbility and in my -- I was so shocked when I got in because in my cover letter I wrote, like, this is -- I'm on my last leg, everybody's telling me, like, you have a disability, you're a woman of color, this should be easy for you. Like, everybody's hungry for this. It's like, it's not easy. And I wrote that in my cover letter. And honestly, being surrounded by a community of like-minded people has supercharged me so much in a way that I never thought a community could. So I would really advocate for anybody feeling that burnout and that -- like, needing to be encouraged, get plugged into a group of people that can feed your ambition and recharge your batteries. And if you need people, like, we're here at RespectAbility, you have through UCLA, like, utilize those college groups. Utilize all of these different apps where you can find that community, and it'll make all the difference.

>> Diane J. Wright: I agree completely. I was in the same space, strangely enough. I had absolutely given up. I'm like, I'm done. This is not working. And now it's completely different. [laughs] And I think inclusion -- I've been thinking about what changed, not just the circumstance but what changed in me. And it's -- inclusion. It's being part of something. And not just some special -- other special interests kind of thing, but this is a pervasive movement that we're all just doing what we do, and we're excellent. I've met such talented, excellent people, who've made, like, funny films, scary films, like, the work is so much better, honestly, than all the people that I've met over the years. And the fact that this talent pool is sitting here, because we're disabled and not getting the opportunities and not being called back is shocking, because there's money on the table. It's ridiculous. It makes no sense. So it's lovely to be part of this for sure.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much for all that you brought to this conversation. I'm empowered, I'm excited, we're all going to continue to fight. We're going to support each other. We're going to keep it going. My goal is everybody that is disabled is going to be hired, working, and running Hollywood. I'm like Issa when she said I'm rooting for everybody black. I'm rooting for everybody disabled. [Laughs] That's what I said. My thing is I'm rooting for everybody disabled. Thank you so much, this was great. I'm so excited. Please, please check out the rest of the study that we did together with the Center for Scholars and Storytellers. If you have any other questions, please reach out to RespectAbility. If you are in the entertainment and media space and looking for support in the work that you are doing to accurately -- impact this audience, this global audience that feels so underrepresented, please reach out to us. And we love highlighting folks like Amanda and Diane and so many other talented people with disabilities that can help you do this work. Hire them! Hire them! So please reach out to us. I want to thank Maira, Amanda, Diane, Lesley, everyone that helped us put this all together. I want to give a shout out to Yalda and Lauren who aren't here, but thank you so much. And with that we are at time. If you all want to say any last few minutes words before we go off, I'll let you have it. Any last words?

>> Diane J Wright: Thank you for hosting, thank you Maira for doing this work, and I want to thank our interpreter for making this accessible.

>> Amanda Aguero: Echo exactly what Diane just said, and thank you for hosting this conversation, and here's to many more.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes, accessible, awesome, inclusive entertainment conversations. So thank you, and I hope you have a great rest of the evening.

>> Maira Karan: Thanks everyone!