Article 19, Episode 12 – Individuality & Accessibility (part 2)

[00:00:00]

[presentation plays]

Marty:
Hey, we're back with Miso, Nate and Jason. We have had such a wonderful conversation so far, and we have so much more to cover with the three of you, and I'm really grateful that you've come back for Part 2 of our conversation and to keep this going. For context, previously we've touched broadly on technology and accessibility and individuality, and now I very purposefully want to intersect all of these, first with a broad cultural question about the use of preferred pronouns. At Tamnan, we have developed what we're calling house rules, or rules of thumb, and one of those rules is not to make assumptions about pronouns when it comes to alternative text, specifically with stock photography, things that we just don't know. We don't wanna make assumptions. And we touched on this a little bit earlier in our last episode. But rather, we wanna use nongendered identifying information, like "professional" or "they," for example. So Miso, I wanna start with you. When you're engaging with visual information, what is your preference in terms of that information that you're seeking? How would you like that presented to you? Would an image lacking gender identification or pronoun, do you feel like that would hinder your experience?

Miso:
After the last question, would it hinder my experience to not have gender identified in the description? I think the answer depends on context. There could be so many different contexts. But I think my kind of personal preference would be that if the gender is known to the person who is describing the image, like you know that for a fact this is a woman-identifying person, this is somebody who is non-binary, if you know that information, I want that to be given to me. Obviously, there are instances where we don't know that. Nobody really knows. Like if you just grabbed an image off the world wide web, you could end up with some image of a person that you don't know the gender—how they would identify—how this person on the image would identify themselves. I think in such case, and if it is relevant, just give the description that would be relevant. For example, I think if it's something like a clothing website or something, if you're selling a socially gendered item or something, I want you to give what kind of body size this person has, where does this particular clothing fall on to, if this person has a broad shoulder versus a petite body, things like that. I think that would be very relevant for me to understand how this particular clothing item might be fitting to this model. But a lot of contexts might be—if people are sitting at a park or something and the point of the description is more about painting the scenery of people sitting around that park

hanging out, rather than individual descriptions of this person's appearance, then I don't think that's really necessary. So I think whatever image description it may be, think about what the main point that needs to be conveyed is, and if the describer makes a judgment that describing the appearance in fine detail would be helpful, then I want the information to be given. But if it's not as relevant, then I think that would be fine.

[00:03:56]

Marty:
That makes very good sense. I appreciate that answer. I'm gonna spin it straight to this particular conversation right now—and this is Marty again. We're recording using Zoom. And I have a question in a moment about Zoom and its similar types of platforms as well. None of us on this call, except for you, Miso, has their preferred pronouns listed. So if I could put Mike, Amanda, Nate, Jason on the spot a little bit, myself as well, why? Why didn't any of us, knowing that we were gonna have a conversation on this, why didn't anyone besides Miso put our preferred pronouns?

Jason:
I will just—as a weak "out," I will say that Nate and I are sharing a computer on his account, and my account does have my personal pronouns on it. That would be my answer.

Marty:
So you're throwing Nate under the bus is what you're doing. That was well done. Nate, any rebuttal there? Or Mike, or Amanda? I can bring you in too.

Nate:
We'll save the rebuttal for when we stop recording, but I will say that I—having already spoken to everyone on this call, I already feel like I have some understanding of people's preferred pronouns coming into this conversation, so I didn't feel like it was necessary to front that information, but it certainly can never hurt to put it in. Also, we just popped into this call, so what's currently listed as my name is my default. I've been too lazy to go in and change it, to add the pronouns, to be totally honest with you, so I'm gonna own up to that.

Mike:
This is Mike. My answer—maybe I'm almost more intentional about it. I pretty much never put my pronouns in there. But it's not because I have some sort of moral objection to doing so, but rather it doesn't matter to me so much personally whether people get it right or wrong. I think I care when other people care, but for me it's not something that—like a large part of my identity is not wrapped up in my

pronouns. And so, maybe as a very minor, an extremely minor form of civil disobedience, I don't do it. If that makes sense.

Marty:
It does make sense. Amanda?

[00:05:58]

Amanda:
I'm kinda here and there. Kinda with Nate, like it's not in my default name but perhaps it should be. I also feel like I tend to add it more often if I'm like on a call with a group of people that I've never met before. I'm not sure if that's the right way of thinking about it. Maybe it should be the default. Maybe I should just change my default name, so I never have to think twice about and stuff if it was just there.

Marty:
I think it comes back to what Miso, you brought up earlier, it's context. Right? If I hear you correctly, Nate and Amanda, especially, is that there's something about context that matters. But it got me thinking also about—Mike, you kind of brought this up a little bit, this idea of divisiveness, and that you might be making a statement. I'm wondering about if there's some kind of value signaling that pronouns have become. So that you're trying too—some—pretentious. Some people might be seeing it as, "look at me, I'm a progressive." We talked a little bit about in the last episode "rainbow washing." Could have an element of that. My question to the group here—anyone can pick up on this one—is, are pronouns and putting your pronouns in places like social media or wherever you can and making it your default, is it kind of like driving a Prius? Are you making a statement about the fact that "Driving a hybrid is very, very important to me, and I'm a better environmentalist than you with your big SUV."

Jason:
This is Jason. To hop in with my thoughts on it, I would say that if that's the intent that you're doing, then obviously that's the intent that you're doing. Depending on how it lands to other people and the impact that it has, that's on them. I would say that it's more important to me personally that even if 90% of the people think that by me putting my personal pronouns on an email signature or on my Slack or something, that that would come across as pretentious or virtue signaling or whatever. I think that it's more important that I come in the space with somebody that actually has personal pronouns that might not be "intuitive," or might be something that actually matters to that person, then I would rather be demonstrating that they are in a space that they should feel comfortable having that listed, or that they are in a space where some people actually value that.

Nate:

This is Nate. I will also jump in here. I think there's value in—there's a lot of existing research and work particularly in organizational leadership that uses the terminology of espoused and enacted values. So companies have to start at the top kind of deciding what their values are gonna be for the institution, and speaking them into existence first before the change can happen that allows that value to be enacted from a UDL—Universal Designed for Learning approach. So including pronouns in an email signature in and of itself is not enough to say I have a fully gender-inclusive institution that I work for. I am a champion of trans rights and feminism just because I put he/him below my name—but language and culture change are clear ties between the two. And if you want the culture of an institution to change, it starts with the language that you use. Because so much of our reality is made up of the words that we choose. Which is why I love my job as an English teacher. It's better to have a step in the right direction than no step at all, and certainly if you want to be an equitable leader, you should also be keeping your eyes and ears open for, "Now that I've taken that step, how are people receiving it?" And if it's something that really does genuinely matter to you and your institution, then you need to be prepared to have conversations around it when you do receive pushback. Because there will be some. So just as Marty did with this question to some extent, if you notice someone doesn't have their pronouns in their signature, there's no harm in asking them why not. Because if that's a value you're setting for your group, that's something that you should be willing to uphold.

[00:09:48]

Miso:
This is Miso. So on top of kinda echoing what Jason and Nate said, and going—maybe alluding to a bit earlier, I can say why I decided to keep my Zoom default's name to include my preferred gender pronouns. One is that I have a name that is not common in the English-speaking majority population. I've grown up in this kind of world, so I kind of have an understanding of what names are more typically given to a female at birth or male at birth kind of person. So one reason is I just want to clearly tell folks that in case my name may not be clear, I am a cisgender woman. And the fact that I am a cisgender person, I have a privilege that I present as a female, I sound like a female person, and I identify as a female person, or woman. But that's not always the case, and I don't want to be making wrong assumptions. I want to minimize that kind of experience and I want to also give people opportunity to minimize causing that phenomenon to happen them. I have one specific instance, like I don't even know when—it was probably after I finished college. I was frantically applying for many jobs, and one of the hiring manager's name was very androgynous, and I didn't—I was like, "Oh, should I say mister or miss?" I tried to look this person up online to find out how they identify. This was not really when preferred gender pronoun was as wide as now. I ended up not being able to find this person's gender identification I don't think. I don't remember how I addressed this letter, but I remember spending probably more time than I

should've trying to figure out how this person wants to be addressed in terms of their gender pronouns. So I think, yeah, it's good, aside from all the progressiveness and values and whatnot. Those are really important too. I think by giving your gender pronoun up front, you can also help other people, to let them know so they don't have to make assumptions about you.

[00:12:17]

Marty:
That's excellent. And it proves again that when we do the right thing—especially you see this all the time in classrooms, Nate and Miso, that when you educate to the edges, it captures everyone. That's a great example of in a more global world where we don't necessarily have the context for a particular name, it helps everybody regardless of whether it's a trans or value signaling or anything else like that. Amanda, I know you wanna jump in with a question.

Amanda:
This is kind of built off of what Mike was talking about and where we were going, I think. As far as creating an inclusive workplace, and a safe culture, other than adding gender pronouns to your email or Slack messages, what are some other things that we can do as colleagues and leaders in the space to create that culture, especially when we're in a mostly remote working environment?

Marty:
Anybody wanna handle that one? That was such a great question, Amanda. Everyone can see, I'm fortunate because I got the Zoom call here, I can see everyone's kinda like rubbing their chins and thinking about it and not sure. So I'm gonna spin this over to Nate and Jason. Do you guys wanna take a first crack at this?

Nate:
I would start by building off of my previous answer and continue to emphasize how changing language is the first step toward changing the culture of a workplace. But the culture of a workplace, just like Miso has already brought into this conversation as well, is contextual. And the position of each individual within that workplace is also contextual. So it's sort of—I would say primarily there responsibility of supervisors to be aware of who's on their team and building in routines that allow them to keep their finger on the pulse of the people in the workplace, while also acknowledging that there may be parts of an employee's life that they don't feel comfortable sharing at work, and not feeling as though as a supervisor you have any right to that information if a person chooses not to share it. So it's really just a matter of keeping your ears open in that sense. I'd also say from a design standpoint, like web design, if you're creating any sort of form or any way of collecting data where gender is a marker you're going to be acknowledging, make it

a text box. Don't make it a check box. Because a lot of times I see on forms, gender identity optional—you don't have to select it—but the options will be male, female, or trans. Trans/non-binary. And you can identify as two of those things. You can be a trans male, you can be a trans female. I have friends who have in the past not know how to answer a question like that. All sense—it makes it harder to clean up your data a lot of the time, but if you're looking for people to self-identify along any social identity marker—race, ethnicity, gender, it's usually better than not to allow it to be an open input so people can choose to identify themselves however they feel is best. There's been a lot of discourse around the difference between the term Black and the term African American for a similar reason. Some people choose not to identify as African American. Allow people to identify themselves however they see fit.

[00:15:28]

Marty:
Nate, it's as if you're reading my mind. There was an article in Show Notes that one of my colleagues posted in our Slack channel called Designing for Identity, and it was written by a woman named Emma Siegel at Google. And her preferred solution, as she was evaluating several social media platforms was just that: a custom field that allows you to put whatever you want. Because for her—in the article she goes on to talk about—she actually does a mix of things. Her preferences aren't usually there, because they're grouped in a particular way, in a more common way. And she's like, "That just doesn't fit me." So I have Jason and Mike, I really wanna bring you in on technical side of things here, because we then were having a conversation of custom fields. What's the accessibility issues that you may have with a custom field versus radial dials or dropdown menus and things like that?

Mike:
I don't necessarily see it as an accessibility issue, although we do have to make these things accessible. But I think you've kinda crossed over that thin line between accessibility and inclusion, right? So the idea is we need to make inclusive forms so the language in the forms is available to people to describe themselves. But regardless of what the values are in that particular pulldown or the checkboxes or whatever they are, they do need to be accessible. Not sure if I'm getting the question right there.

Marty:
You are. And what we talked about was then I joked, we have to figure out what to do with error messages when you have custom fields, because error messages as we know can be particularly challenging for screen readers and other things if it shows up out of order. Or does it need to be in line? And we haven't really completely—

Mike:
I think what you're getting at, Marty, and this isn't unique to an identity issue or an inclusion issue, but rather poor accessibility further marginalizes people that are already on the margins, if that make sure. So if you are trying to choose a particular identity for yourself, be it by race or by gender or something else, and that form is inaccessible, you're one step even further removed, because you can't even work around that particular problem. I think that maybe that's what you're trying to get at. So it really just comes down to the fact that it becomes doubly important for people that want to express themselves more but maybe are also pairing that with a particular challenge with getting that form completed—we have to design for accessibility, but that accessibility sometimes as an inclusive design is really where it's at. But it's another higher order level of thinking and design and building and testing and rolling out and understanding users. Jason, I'll turn it over to you if you wanna add anything to that.

[00:18:00]

Jason:
I'm not sure if what I'm going to say is gonna answer your question. I think it's more of just a side note, which is that—again, I work in the travel space, and I think that if you think about various airlines and things like that, they have forms. A typical form field is your gender. I think there are more constraints for a form field like gender depending on the type of form. So I would assume that an airline has more limitations on the options for gender because they maybe have to match it with your ID that's with the US government or something, and that's how you end up going on a plane and flying. I don't really know under the hood how that works. I also know that maybe a year or two ago, American Airlines and Delta had added non-binary as an option onto their gender form field, and that was pretty unprecedented at the time. I'm not sure how many airlines have followed suit with that. But it's—yeah, I think depending on the type of company and the type of space that it's operating in, I think that you're gonna face even more limitations, even if the company wants to be more inclusive. I think they just might be operating in a space that by nature of laws is exclusionary.

Marty:
Yeah, it's interesting you bring that up, Jason. I think it isn't just about US travel, right? When you talk about international travel, there are plenty of countries where being transgendered or gay or of a particular ethnic origin is illegal, punishable by imprisonment or worse. So it's hard for companies that are trying to operate in international spaces, compliant with all those laws. They have to kind of weave a fine thread through all of that to make it work. There's a lot of systems. I think in the travel industry, you talk about these aggregation systems where they have to talk to so many other systems, and so many different companies, all at the same

time, and they have to be in the same platform or at least compatible platforms. You kinda end up with probably what is a very slow to change kind of paradigm. I think that's what you're getting at right, Jason? Is that these things—

Jason:
Yeah, definitely.

Marty:
They don't move fast.

Jason:
Unfortunately, yeah. They don't always move fast.

Nate:
You know, Marty, if I may, I wanna turn back to something we were talking about earlier, because this idea of moving fast, right? We're a small business and one of the things that's happened that we've embraced is making it OK to make mistakes with each other. We've talked about this before. I don't know if we've talked about it from the gender pronouns perspective, but we've certainly talked about it around personal preferences around physical contact or things we're OK with talking about at work, or foods that are in the kitchen, things like that. And the idea is we're always trying to say, "Hey, it's OK, we shouldn't be all knotted up in our stomachs about how we talk to each other or refer to each other, but once somebody has expressed an opinion, that we all respect that.

[00:20:44]

Mike:
I think that that's kinda the biggest thing. Because I think—one of the things that I first ran into when I first started going to conferences—and maybe the conferences I go to are just a little more progressive than most—I started seeing people put their personal pronouns, even where—some of the places I was going were giving stickers that were badged with color and pronouns you put right on your attendee badge. This was a few years ago, and I'm starting to see it a lot. At first, I was a little uncomfortable. Like I know how I identify, but I don't see everybody doing it. Am I supposed to do this? What if I don't do it? I was very nervous. Because I don't know if this conference follows the rules we follow at the office around it's OK to be wrong about this with a person once or maybe even twice. After that, maybe it becomes on purpose, and you address it. But I just wanted to get everyone's take on what do you think about—is it OK to make this mistake? And how should people feel if they're new to this topic? I have a feeling that although it's not new to us on this call, because we're trying to solve for this issue—trying to re-normalize—or normalize a new language and a new way to sort of interact with each other? How should people that are relatively new to it feel about it?

Amanda:
Mike, would you mind just clarifying what you mean by "mistake"? Do you mean accidentally calling somebody by the wrong pronoun?

Mike:
Yeah.

Amanda:
Or identifying yourself as like incorrect pronoun?

Mike:
I'm not worried about identifying myself as an incorrect pronoun. I think most of us understand what the pronouns are, although there may be a few that are popping up that I don't know they mean right now. But that's OK. Somebody will tell me when they want me to use it. I'm more thinking about if I call somebody by the wrong pronoun. I've misidentified them, maybe Miso, if I don't know what a typical male or female name is in Korean, I may make the wrong assumption. So how can I feel OK—how should I feel about making that mistake the first time? With you, if I didn't know you and I wrote you a letter and said "Dear sir"?

Miso:
This is Miso speaking. I think—to answer that very last question, if somebody wrote me a letter, said Mr. Ankwak [ph] or something, I don't know. I probably would just think that they just didn't know and probably—sometimes I remove my email signature depending on situations. I'll have it there and maybe I'll [audio cuts out] choose to tell them. If this person's somebody that I never interacted with. But I think to get to your original question of like how should you feel if you make a mistake, particularly with misgendering somebody, or using a wrong pronoun, I think especially with folks who prefer to use "they," and almost exclusively, if not exclusively, just they/them/theirs, while having a particular gender presenting name or appearance, I haven't been in that particular situation of being the person who gets misgendered, misused my preferred pronoun. So I can't really say how I would feel, but I think as somebody who's doing that one, I think it's important to feel like yes, it's OK to make a mistake, everybody makes mistakes. And too, I think just being more conscious about—paying more attention to if they have a preferred gender pronoun signatures or by their name. And I think, on a related note, if you know somebody whose preferred pronouns are they/them/theirs, if you see other people not using that pronoun for this person, I think you can give them a gentle nudge to say, "Oh hey, by the way, So-and-So prefers to use they/them/theirs." I think that would be helpful in this context.

[00:24:36]

Nate:
I think Miso's right on the money there. And I think Mike—and correct me if I'm wrong—I hear in your question sort of a focus on like, "How should I feel if I find myself in that situation where I've misgendered someone?" And I think with all due love and respect that that's the wrong question to ask, because what you're actually doing there is centering yourself in a interpersonal interaction where you're actually trying to create and foster inclusion and belonging for the other person. So you made yourself the subject of the question, but the question should really be about the other person. I've found in my life in situations where I've misgendered trans or non-binary friends, a lot of the time they end up feeling more uncomfortable if I start beating myself up over having misgendered them than they would if I just acknowledged, "Oops, I made a mistake," and move on. So I think we have this tendency in American culture especially to want to apologize and see how we can repair harm that we've caused, and with something like misgendering or microaggressions, like comments that you might make off the cuff, the best way to say you're sorry is to check it in yourself and to not do it next time. So you could apologize to that person and that totally depends on the instance of harm that was caused and the person you're talking to and your relationship to them, but by and large the thing that the other person would most likely want is just to make sure that doesn't happen again. So part of that also just starts with, start noticing your head when you assign pronouns to other people or other things. Even babies, right? Somebody introduces you to their child and they're wearing blue clothes, you might instinctively ask, "Oh, how old is he?" Right? If you don't yet know a child's identity, or you haven't asked the parents that, then maybe start correcting in yourself, like use "them" until you know. Like, "How old are they?" Because that is a perfectly fine way to ask the question until you've had that information presented to you. Same thing with pets, right? If you see somebody playing with their dog. Just start noticing that in yourself and trying to correct it in situations where the stakes are very, very low, so that when you find yourself in that situation with somebody who chooses—who wants to be identified by a certain set of pronouns that you might be less familiar with, you already have some practice using it in other contexts.

[00:26:55]

Jason:
This is Jason. And I think there are obviously other use cases and scenarios, to go off of what Nate was saying at the end, where some that are more common, like people refer to their "partners," or something, people don't say "my husband" or "my wife" as much. And maybe that's because they also don't wanna presume if they're gonna ask somebody else. You don't wanna presume that somebody is heterosexual or homosexual or somebody that has a wife or a husband. So we're just saying like, ask them about somebody's partner or something would take that assumption away from it. The same way that if you don't know if somebody identifies with he-series pronouns or she-series pronouns or something totally

different, just going with something that could be more all-encompassing for any of those scenarios. I'm not gonna equate it with something like Merry Christmas versus Happy Holidays—

Mike:
Nate, I really appreciate you sort of calling me to task on making the question about—the problem about me as opposed to making it about the other person, because that's a really good observation. I think where the question I was asking was coming from—and I wanna come back to it for a second. There's something that is also not acknowledged, which is this idea of un-gendering, or to allow people to set their own preferences for it is relatively new, right? And I don't know how old all of you are, but I'm guessing you're a lot younger than me. And I am a lot younger than a lot of my clients, the people I'm working with. And so we have a lifetime of language history and learning that has to be either unlearned. And so it's really hard for those of us who spend a lifetime using something like gender—and there's more than just gender—just picking on that one for a second. Using gender pronouns to make something more interpersonal—to make more of a connection. Because I'm acknowledging more of the identity, but there's shorthand for that in culture and language. Now, what we're saying together in this call is that we're gonna do it differently now, and we wanna teach everybody how to do it differently. So in essence, when I'm in a situation where I know that I don't know everybody's gender, and I have to figure that out, and it's potentially a large group of people, it kind of does become about me all of a sudden, right? I have to put myself in check and I have to wonder, "Am I gonna be sitting here offending everybody? Or can I just use the language that I know and allow people to correct me when I've got it wrong?" And be OK with being wrong occasionally. Modifying my behavior as I go, but do I need to be worried about it in advance? And I think that's kinda what I'm trying to get at. Because the question isn't so much for me. I know how I'm dealing with it already. Because I'm already kind of a certain bit down this journey. But I know when I talk to other people, and I want to educate them on this, and I wanna use this podcast or my own conversations with them to guide them, what should I be counseling people to say, "You shouldn't be stressed out about this," or "You really do need to spend some time to engage with this in advance, because if you don't you're really gonna be flubbing interpersonal conversations." Help me out here. What am I supposed to tell them?

Nate:
I think that's a very real reaction. And I also felt like I understood the intent of your question. So I hope for listeners of the podcast, we know there's no bad blood here. I was giving Mike feedback given the context.

[00:29:55]

Mike:

It's all good. It's all good, man.

Nate:
Now, I also have feedback for Marty about his hatred of Priuses, but that'll come later as well. But I think the stakes of this conversation also—we should acknowledge that part of why it might feel as difficult as it does is because while these interactions we're talking about where we're using preferred pronouns seem so minute, they are a reflection of a broader system in which we know people who identify as trans and non-binary are still facing incredible high rates of violence. Actually, last year, 2020, in the United States, according to Human Rights Campaign was the deadliest year on record for transgender Americans: 44 trans people were murdered, and primarily trans people of color. We've all heard these statistics. They've all come up for us in some conversation at some point. So we all have this lingering awareness of the society we find ourselves in. I have a tendency to carry that pressure around sometimes, right? To feel as though I am responsible for white American culture as a white American and cis culture as a cisgender man, with male privilege in a society that is also incredibly sexist and misogynistic and all of those things start to weight you down, and you start to feel like Atlas, holding up the sky. And if you just take a step back and just try to take that weight off your shoulders and focus in on the interaction that's directly happening in the moment, I think it just becomes a lot easier, right? So as you start to create a routine for yourself of becoming aware of moments when you were assuming an identity marker about another person, you can start to correct your own thought processes, and nobody else needs to be involved in that process that's happening inside your own head, so that it doesn't become an active conscious thought every time you enter a space of "I now need to learn the gender of every person in this room," but rather, as you're talking to somebody, it'll just naturally flow in conversation. But that something when you meet someone for the first time, you should ask, and try to hold on to it. But it may take some time, and that's OK. And you can also acknowledge that for the other person. You can say, "Hey, I forgot what you told me last time I interacted with you. Could you please remind me how you identify?" Like, normal human decency has started to feel for me like it's becoming increasingly difficult in a society where everyone is oppressed in some capacity. But actually, if you take a step back and think about it, it should flow pretty naturally how you used to interact with someone, and the other person will understand in that interaction, as they get to know you better, where you're coming from, because that's just how we as humans interact with each other. So I think sometimes putting that extra pressure on yourself and beating yourself over the back over those interactions tends to make things more uncomfortable for everyone involved, when really if you just take it minute by minute, an moment by moment, and we all flub—Mike Alister [ph], you used the language of I'm pretty far along on this journey, but I also think it's wrong to think of a journey of inclusivity as a straight line. We're existing in an orb, and we're swimming around. Then there are days where we didn't get enough sleep the night before, so we forget to think of

something in a conversation. So we always have to be constantly checking ourselves on these approaches. But rather than thinking of it just as a linguistic thing, think of it as an interpersonal dynamics issue of just, how am I treating this other person? And if I am a person who values treating people with kindness and respect, then by setting that value for myself, again, espoused and active, if that becomes your focus then your behavior will follow suit. But I don't know if anyone else wants to jump in on that.

[00:33:24]

Marty:
This is Marty. Nate, I appreciate everything that you just said there, especially the end, around this is an interpersonal relationship situation, where we're floating around this orb. Because so often we find ourselves a part of the outrage machine. And it's one of the reasons why [audio cuts out] podcasts so much. Because we can have a long-form conversation about a heavy topic. Or the idea of just having conversations with colleagues, coworkers, friends, relatives, in a way where you know them, or you know enough of them where you can have a more thoughtful conversation. I would encourage everyone wherever they are listening to this, step away from the outrage machine. Because that's not changing mindsets. That's not fixing any of the issues we have in our world. So I just really want to appreciate what you just said about this being interpersonal. At Tamnan, we talk a lot about digital accessibility, obviously. One of those paradigms that we talk about is mindsets changing skillsets. It's not dissimilar to any of this. But how do you change mindsets? It takes time, and it takes building relationships with people, getting them to trust. Getting them to understand who you are and why you're saying what you're saying before they'll even begin to maybe rethink how they approach design, for example. And this is a little bit more important, because of some of the statistics that you mentioned, but it's not dissimilar at all.

Nate:
I'm mindful of sharing the air here, but I just wanted to make one more quick anecdotal comment, which is just, I also appreciated Mike acknowledging his age and the ways in which being an old fart can affect the way that you enter conversations like this and genuinely objectively make it more difficult to change mindsets, right? There's plenty of psychological research that backs that up as well. And with that, there comes an understanding too—and I'm happy to back this up as someone who works with 11-year-olds every day—that the rising generation is the most globally aware in history. Right? They are growing up in an age where they are constantly exposed to other people's perspectives and understanding of the ways in which their own individual identities and the way that they treat other people as a result of those identities have real impacts on the world around them. So I take a lot of hope from the fact that like, look, a lot of us are on the way out. Some of us sooner than others, ahem. But we should be doing the best we can to

start—prioritize young voices in these conversations. When you hear young people advocating for certain things, don't write it off as, "You're young, you are inexperienced, you don't yet know the realities of the world you're entering." Because in fact, there is perhaps no one more aware of the realities of the world that they are entering than the young people who have their finger immediately on the pulse of their generation through their phones.

[00:36:12]

Mike:
First of all, I'll say, Marty and I are the same age, so it's a race to the finish for us. I think what you just said there is really cool. I am actually very jealous of a lot of what people that are coming out of high school or college in the last five years, some of the benefits they have of being already indoctrinated to have a more open mind to some of these things. I don't know if that's true or not. It's how it feels, maybe just because I'm getting old, and everybody seems so much cooler than me. But I think the idea that—sorry, Marty's laughing. Everyone's always been cooler than me. I've never been cool.

Marty:
Total nerd. You're a total nerd.

Mike:
Yeah. Total nerd.

Marty:
Hold it with pride.

Mike:
I do. Absolutely. Near and dear. But I think it's not so much that I'm looking at young people coming into the workforce or coming into my company saying, "Kid, you don't know what's going on. I'm gonna show you the ropes." Or, "Yeah, you don't really know how to fit in here. You'll learn." It's more like I have envy. Or at least—maybe that's too strong of a word, but certainly there's a bit of admiration I have for the openness that they have that I'm now teaching myself to do. Like for instance, the past couple years I've really been trying to remove gender from when I talk to a group of people, and say, "Hey folks, thanks for joining," as opposed to, "Hey guys," or "Hey guys and girls," or whatever. It's a tough thing. And I'll tell you, it's like, go one month and just un-gender your group speech. It's almost impossible for somebody in their 40s. It takes a lot of effort. It's so much harder than I thought it was going to be to do as an exercise. And I think when I did that, it definitely gave me some lasting habits. But I'm kinda curious, for those of you that are younger here, has that been a challenge for you? Or is it part of your

natural speech that you've adopted through your later school years? Marty, since we're the same age, have you found that difficult too?

Marty:
Yes. Especially "guys," I will say. I have struggled not calling people guys. And I'm constantly going, "Guys…and gals," and I notice it every single time. So that's my burden to bear. Language is, I think, habitual, and it takes effort to change. It takes intention to change. So might as well get started now.

[00:38:25]

Miso:
This is Miso. It doesn't have to be part of the podcast or not, but one thing that I'll say is that also I think the way this conversation has gone, we're kind of just speaking to this dominant English-speaking world, and that's fine because I'm presuming most of people who listen to this podcast are living in this kind of environment, where English is a major language that's spoken—a prevalent language that's being used. One observation that I've made, ever since entering college and then being exposed to the world of gender pronouns and gender inclusivity in the linguistic sense is that how much gendering there is in English language. For example, the terms like "you guys," or having to have that pronoun. In Korean, you can make a conversation without alluding to a gender pronoun ever. Like for most of the conversation. There are different nuances in Korean language. For example, the way I would address my siblings, the terminology I would use would depend on my gender identity and my siblings' gender identity. That's not really true in the English language. The reason why I bring that up is because I think depending on one's primary cultural or linguistic background, this gender pronoun thing can feel like, why, first of all, are we using gender pronouns so much in this language? I think that can sometimes throw people off. I think, if possible, don't be quick to judge about others, but focusing on ourselves, like what we do to minimize unintentionally harming people and also what are the ways in which we can stand up for people who might be having negative experiences because of intentional or unintentional gender exclusionary practices.

Marty:
So Miso, the last question in this segment is, I wanna build off of that. So as we're thinking about social change, and as we're thinking about cultural touchstones, catalyzing events, in your expertise and experience as an advocate who's close to gender equity communities, is there anything on the horizon that might propel this movement forward even faster than it is already going?

Miso:
The short answer is I don't know. You might wanna cut this segment out, but—

Marty:
No, that's great. That's a perfectly fine answer. That's exactly what we're looking for. Nate, Jason, can you think of anything?

Jason:
I think Nate already spoke to this a little bit, but I would say the incoming generation, I guess, or just, you know, younger people who I think at least in the States seem to have a much broader exposure to different people, because of social media. I would say social media is definitely a tradeoff in terms of the benefits that you get from it and the negative externalities and the consequences you can get from it. But I would say a benefit from it is that it's a lot easier to keep in touch and get exposed to different kinds of people with different backgrounds than just your own, if that was what you were gonna use social media to do. So I would say yeah, a lot of younger folks seem to already know a lot more about things than I knew when I was their age, and comparably I know a lot more about things than some of the other people on this call than they did when they were my age. So it'll keep going like that and hopefully continue to move in the correct direction.

[00:42:00]

Nate:
I would second everything Jason just said, and also just sort of reiterate that technology not only is a reflection of this conversation that we're having and of like a need for accessibility in technology, but it can also be a facilitation tool, right? Like technology facilitates access to information that builds emotional intelligence and perspective-taking as long as said technology is offered in a way that is in and of itself accessible. So circling back to a point I made in our first episode together, is we can't just assume that people understand how to use that technology, but if people learn how to use their technology with a critical eye, rather than just doomscrolling through a Twitter feed and reading a lot of hot takes, they can use that same technology to watch YouTube videos in which people speak openly about their experiences as members of marginalized communities, or to read articles that have been written—countless articles about all of these different facets of identity, and recognizing the limitations of language in that process, right? Just in the past, I would say, 5-10 years, we've seen the LGBTQ community go from using the moniker LGBTQ to expanding that to LGBQTQIA to S, to now LGBTQ+ and I think that process, watching that a member of said community, has helped me to recognize that there's going to be continuing evolutions and it may sometimes feel hard to keep up with what the most current trend is. And as a result, we should focus on A, avoiding speaking in generalities as much as we can, because that's how we reinforce our own biases, and just giving each individual as much autonomy as possible to identify themselves. Because the language I might choose to use— sometimes I feel uncomfortable about the fact that I as a gay man am lumped into the same community as trans Americans, when my experience is so different from

theirs. We're considered by broader society to be part of the same community, but our lived experiences are vastly different from one another's. So just focusing on how each individual has their own story and their own way to identity themselves and just showing each person respect in each interaction as best you can.

Marty:
With that, Mr. Jason and Nate and Ms. Miso, thank you so much. We're gonna move on to our final segment. Bit of a lightning round here, but we ask the same three questions to all of our guests. So are you ready for your three questions? So I'm gonna start with you, Nate, then go to Jason, and then Miso, and then we'll swing it back around. First question, what is one personal accommodation that you make?

Nate:
I know it's a lightning round. Can you clarify what you mean by an accommodation in this?

Marty:
Absolutely. So what we're looking for here—and it is in the broadest sense—is something that you might do to make accessing information, whether at work or personally, a little bit easier.

Miso:
Easier for yourself or easier for others? Or both?

[00:45:00]

Marty:
Well, that's a great question. You could take it either direction you wanted to, but I'm gonna say for yourself is the way that it was intended when we structured it. But if you have something more important to offer, then feel free to answer both sides of that coin.

Jason:
My answer to this question from one of our earlier episodes, just for reference, Nate, I said I'm very distracted by sounds, so I invested in soundproof glass in the office when we built it out so that I could have a quiet workspace.

Nate:
There you go. OK. That all makes perfect sense, and I'm glad I got that clarification. My first instinct was—well, it might be an answer that Jason's gonna use, so—you're not gonna use that answer? OK. Never mind. Then I will use that answer. It's actually not for myself. It's for others. And actually, Miso comes to mind because Miso's the person who sort of taught me to do this, which is Facebook's algorithms are not great in terms of describing visually what are in

images that you upload, so I've become more aware and more active in when I upload a photo to a social media platform, providing a short description in my caption of what I intended to show in that photo, so that whoever is viewing my photos, if they have a visual disability, they're still able to access the information in the photo.

Marty:
And that right there, Mr. Nate, is why you got straight A's in school. That was an unbelievably on-the-nose answer. Well done. Mr. Jason, how bout you?

Jason:
So I initially dramatically misinterpreted this question when you first said it and when I thought about what my answer was gonna be. So my answer initially does not apply. My second answer, which was my backup answer, is what Nate said. Because Nate, after being instructed about it from Miso, then showed it to me and I think that I've started adding picture descriptions to my images as well. Man, now I gotta think about a different third answer.

Marty:
Go with your first answer. I'm very curious. No, I—

Nate:
My first answer was that I really misinterpreted what your question was. I thought it was like something that you were doing to better society or something, so I was like, "I'm a vegan." So that is sort of trying to help with the environment and stuff. That's not really what you meant when you said that, so it's not the answer I'm gonna go with.

Marty:
Miso, you wanna jump in while Jason and I brainstorm for him?

Miso:
This is Miso. For others, one thing that I've been learning a lot in my current work where large segment of the population that I interact with, albeit indirectly for the most part, is folks with intellectual disability. So I've been learning a lot about plain language summary, meaning when we put out a webinar on complex topics, or like when we talk about some policy or something, rather than using all the jargons and lots of acronyms, I'm putting kind of one-page, sometimes longer, but a basically summary of whatever topic that is written. I think at most, like ninth-grade level. I think typically—yeah, like it's intended to be accessible for a middle-school reading level, however you define that. That's something I've been learning a lot. Now I'm really mindful of when I write, just noticing, "Wow, dang," like "I don't need to be using these words." Yeah. So that's one. In terms of personal what do I do for myself, I think that can be an episode in itself, in large part because I'm a blind

person and I live in a world that's designed for sighted people. One simple thing that comes to mind as I speak is whenever I move to a new apartment or something, I put a little dot markers on my microwave, washer, or on oven, to kind of indicate mostly flat buttons so then I know where the buttons that I want to press are.

Marty:
That's phenomenal. I want to have an episode around that—more of that, Miso. Thank you. Alright, Jason.

Jason:
I did—yeah, I did think of an answer. My answer is that I would say four years ago I read an article by Tristan Harris that was talking about the colors that the web uses in order to keep you on your phone for longer and whether or not that was true or not, I still decided to take the article at face value and I switched my phone to be in black and white, and it's been in black and white for the past four years. I like to think that it's contributed to me having less screen time. Whether that is true or not, unclear. I also about a year ago added time limits to a lot of the applications that I use the most, like Instagram or Words with Friends or the news, doomscrolling on the news app. So, you know, can only doomscroll for like ten minutes then I get kicked off until tomorrow. So those things.

Marty:
Jason, if we ever happen to find ourselves in the same location, let's say the Poconos, you're gonna have to show me how to make my phone black and white. I absolutely wanna try that out.

Jason:
Yeah. For sure, yeah. I have since switched from Android to Apple, and you can decide whether that's the good switch or the bad switch, but I know how to do it on both systems. Feel free to call me up and I can help you with that.

Marty:
Awesome. Alright, second question. What is something about the world that keeps you up at night? Miso, you go first.

Miso:
Yeah, right now at this moment I do worry about COVID. But I think that answer might have been different in non-pandemic times. But yeah. That's something I do worry about at night at times.

Marty:
Jason, what about you?

Jason:
COVID is definitely something that keeps me up at night. I would say less acutely than that, just as somebody that works in tech, I think the real unknowns of the effects of technology on people that are six and have an iPad or a tablet, or people that—I think Nate and Miso and I are probably some of the last folks that really grew up and had a large chunk of our childhood or all or our childhood and beyond not really having technology at all. I mean, I didn't get a phone until I was like 14, and I think that's obviously still a crazy answer for people that are older than me, but people that are younger than me probably have had a phone for much longer than that, and definitely a phone that could do more than just call my mom, which is what my phone did. So yeah, I don't know however many years from now what those effects will look like on the children of today.

[00:51:13]

Nate:
My boyfriend once again stealing my answer here, but I think I'll actually kinda bridge the gap between the two and say sort of more of an intermediate something that's keeping me up at night is still not knowing what the long-term effects of the past year will be on the kids that I work with. We were back together in person for about a month at the end of the school year, so I got to know my students from last year in person a little bit. And just in that little bit of time, I saw issues arising that I had never seen before in a classroom, and to think about approaching them next year at scale over the course of the full school year is a little daunting at this moment in time, but I know educators being who we are, we will take it in stride.

Marty:
Well said. So, final question. We'll go in reverse order, to give Miso the final word. Nate, you've given us some book recommendations already in our previous episode, and we've talked about articles and other things, but I'm looking for a new recommendation, of a game, a book, a movie, a TV show, whatever it is. Give us something that we should be interacting with.

Nate:
I have been consuming far too much media in the past year, so I could recommend any number of things right now. And I'm trying to think what would be most valuable for listeners of this podcast. So I'm actually gonna give two. I'm gonna give one that's along the lines of what we've been discussing, then I'll give one that's separate and just for fun. Along the lines of what we've been discussing, there's a show that is new on HBO. It's called Generation. It does not have a whole lot of viewership, to my knowledge, so they could use the viewers. But it's the first show that's being—the head writer is, I believe, 19 years old. So the show has a very youthful voice. It addresses a lot of the issues we've been talking about, particularly around gender inclusivity, from a young perspective as a result. There'

a lot of very mature content in there, so if that bothers you, maybe don't view it. But it also could be eye-opening for folks to see sort of how this is being discussed by young people today. And irrelevant but always fun recommendation, a book I just recently finished, by one of my favorite authors who historically has been a kids' author but is starting to write for adults. His name's John Green. He wrote an essay collection called The Anthropocene Reviewed, which is a series of essays in which he rates different human odd creations as though they were Yelp reviews on a five-star scale. So he'll talk about anything from like a Nathan's hot dog eating contest to the City of Indianapolis. Just uses those as ways of giving lenses into his own life an experiences. Great beach read, easy-breezy and fun.

[00:53:38]

Jason:
This is Jason. I will give you two options. It can be a choose your own adventure of kind of the two different ways that I engage with things. I think all of the books I read a very much not escapist, and many of them are actually pretty sad. And then I would say that the TV shows I watch are largely very escapist, and they are mostly happy. So the TV shows that I watch—and I don't watch many TV shows, but I have watched the Great Pottery Throwdown, which is basically the same thing as the Great British Bake Off, except with pottery. And then there's something called Making It, where they make stuff like, I don't know, little household items and whatnot. It's hosted by Amy Poehler and Nick Offerman, and it's very wholesome. So those are two very wholesome options. But on the book front, I would recommend anything by Nicole Dennis-Benn, which is only a few things, because she's only written two novels so far, but hopefully a third one soon. So she wrote Here Comes the Sun, which is my favorite book. That came out a few years ago. And then she wrote Patsy as her second book, and that one came out about a year or two ago. Marty is nodding his head on screen because I gave him both of them. Whether he read them in the past two years is up to him.

Marty:
I know those books. I know right where they are. Miso, why don't you bring us home with one recommendation. Or you can follow Nate and Jason and give us two or more. Recommendation for a game, a book, a movie, a TV show, whatever you've got that we should be interacting with.

Miso:
It's a high pressure. And it's kind of out of topics. We've really been thinking about, talking about—in large part because my brain can't think right now. So one I recently finally went and watched In the Heights in the movie theater for the first movie I've seen since the pandemic in the movie theater. Yeah. I just really enjoyed the music and the storyline and everything. And in terms of one most recently read books is Pachinko by Min Jin Lee. I guess it kinda relates to my

Korean-American identity. It speaks a lot to kind of specifically in Japan during the time when Japan was occupying Korea, and kind of just portraying the generation of Korean families living in Japan. Yeah, but that thick book to my younger brother, which I've been told it's just sitting in my parents' house on his desk. So knock on wood—so I'll recommend to all the listeners of the podcast.

Marty:
Miso, Nate, Jason, thank you so much. We could have made this into a five part series. So I for one very much look forward to listening to the new podcast by the three of you that will come out sometime soon, I hope. But in the meantime, I just wanna share my appreciation for spending so much time with us and sharing so much insight and diving into all of these wonderful topics. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Nate:
Thank you all and stay tuned for Double Dare that Whammy.

Miso:
Thank you. And let's wait for the show. I second that.

Jason:
Thanks, everybody.

Amanda:
Thank you everyone.

Miso:
Thank you.

[presentation plays]