

00:00:03:15 - 00:00:24:00

Speaker 1

Hello. My name is Lily Lipman. I am a white person with shoulder length curly brown hair and wearing a blue shirt with some striped sleeves. And I am really excited to be here today. I'm going to pass it over to Dominic and then I'll introduce myself a little bit further.

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Speaker 2

Hi, my name is Dominic Bradley. I used them pronouns. I am a Black person with short hair glasses. I'm wearing an orange top. I am an artist based in Brooklyn, New York, and I'm really glad to be here today. Also, I'm going to pass it back over to Lily.

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Speaker 1

Thank you. So my pronouns are she they I'm still in the process of figuring that out. So that might change at a later point. But I am a disabled person in a lot of different ways. I am an artist actor or educator, administrator, access consultant, conglomerate of a person. I'm based in New York and I'm really passionate about disabled people working in cultural institutions and cultural institutions, doing a better job of representing disabled people both internally and externally.

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Speaker 1

Dominic, Can you tell me more about yourself?

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Speaker 2

Sure. So I actually have a social work background and was in the field for a few years before transitioning to the arts. And as a disabled person myself, the arts have proved to be a lifeline for me and I think that my personal creative practice has all been about finding ways to preserve that outlet. No matter what my mind is doing or my body is doing.

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Speaker 2

And full disclosure, this happens to be one of those low points in my practice where things are kind of shallow right now.

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Speaker 1

Thanks for sharing that. So we're here today talking about accountability. And for me, a big part of accountability is also transparency. So Dominic and I have just met today and are going to be going back and forth and asking each other some questions and having a bit of a conversation. And I'll kick that off now by asking the first question, which is, Dominic, what does accountability mean to you and how would you define it?

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Speaker 2

I've been thinking about this question today and in many conversations that I've been a part of about how to ability it's kind of had a punitive edge to it, like who to point to when things get messed up. But I tend to think of accountability as agreements that we can make with ourselves and others.

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Speaker 1

That is so beautiful. I've been thinking about this as well and also having this reaction to the word accountability of like, well, who's responsible for this? But I think to me, accountability is an agreement with yourself and with others to be responsible for your impact on a space and your actions with others and for others. I am curious, I'm going to go a little bit off script.

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Speaker 1

How does accountability having a punitive edge change how you've thought about it or change how you want to talk about it? Today?

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Speaker 2

I think that in some instances, depending on how conversation around accountability is handled, accountability, it could be a scary word. And it's been a scary word for me in the past. And I think this is

kind of a developing thought here. But I think the difference between accountability in the punitive sense and accountability and B, agreement sense is that people aren't just charged with something.

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Speaker 2

They're also being empowered to make certain decisions that they have latitude should be able to carry out both those decisions and that it's something that is an ongoing living, breathing thing that can evolve to meet the needs of everyone involved.

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Speaker 1

Wow, that was gorgeous. And what do you think are some of the challenges around accountability in the way that you're talking about it as being sort of a developing conversation?

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Speaker 2

I'm thinking specifically of those who are working within cultural institutions where there is a top down hierarchy. And when you try to introduce accessibility and disability justice into environments that weren't necessarily built for that, and maybe there is something that kind of gets introduced as maybe a standalone initiative rather than something that is allowed to penetrate the culture of the institution.

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Speaker 2

I see that as actually a really big challenge.

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Speaker 1

What's the difference between a standalone initiative and something that changes a culture?

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Speaker 2

I'm going to try to make an analogy here. When I was in the social work field, there was a push for what is known as trauma informed training, and it was kind of based on the similar idea as a universal first aid. Like you assume that in any environment that you come into you that there are people who have a history of trauma and you adjust to the environment accordingly.

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Speaker 2

And I think that what staff and management had trouble with was how this trickled down to policies and practices within the agency. So, for example, my office was based in a transitional housing residence. So you had people who lived there and they were on their way to obtaining permanent housing and also staff who had offices there, who can talk, who conducted business there.

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Speaker 2

And one struggle was around staff being able to come in and inspect the rooms. And what I pointed out is, you know, some of these people, they have trauma. Some of these people, they have been justice involved. So busting in, even though your staff and when you're there to do business, you know, I didn't think was so trauma informed and kind of the mindset around that is that staff wanted to be able to catch them out doing things that they weren't supposed to do.

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Speaker 2

And I tried to reframe that by suggesting, okay, you still got to do what you got to do, but there's a way to do it that is more respectful. So knocking on, knocking on the door, not like the police, but knocking on the door, identifying yourself and saying, hi, I'm, you know, still in the blank and I'm going to kill it.

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Speaker 2

And and then doing it. And I felt like it was a small, you know, in the context of the operations of that site. It was a small thing, but I felt a crucial thing to strengthen the relationships between the staff and the people we were serving in, that residents.

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Speaker 1

It's interesting because when you're kind of sharing this example, there's so many different layers that I'm picking up on with that. I'm hearing that there's the individual worker being responsible and accountable, whatever word you want to use it for fulfilling their duties as laid out by the organization. But I'm also hearing that there's an accountability to be using some best practices when you're interacting with human beings.

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Speaker 1

I'm curious how those two things can happen at the same time, especially in a system like you're saying, that's not set up for us to use best practices and use kind of humanistic approaches. I don't know if that's something that you've thought about or if you have ideas about, but I'm curious if you do.

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Speaker 2

I think my first thought is we all have access needs. I think that there is a misconception that only disabled people have access needs and they're somehow special or above and beyond what a cultural institution might do normally. And I think that if we can make that reframe into everybody has access needs, so how do we serve in the broadest sense, the access needs of everyone that we want involved in project or an event?

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Speaker 2

Oh.

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Speaker 1

I love that. I'm thinking to some of the challenges that I'm seeing in the way that we're currently that accountability is usually talked about is this idea that, like, you can mess it up so badly that your room almost like there's there's a real fear when we talk about accountability and I'm wondering and this is all a weird question that I haven't been asked and I would really love for us to start asking questions like this a bit more.

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Speaker 1

But is it possible for accountability to be fun or to be imaginative or artistic and have you seen any examples of that?

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Speaker 2

I think that there is a possibility of accountability being fun and creative and artistic. I think where I have seen this before is not necessarily in the arts scene, but in the kink scene. And, you know, just to provide some examples, the way the invitations are worded that include accessibility information that let's people know if they can be in space, clear and plain language around the rules of the space, the space being stocked with various things that attendees would need, demos around topics of interest.

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Speaker 2

So those are, you know, again, this was not an arts example, but that is a place where I have seen playful, fun, creative, sensual, even town ability.

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Speaker 1

I just read or am in the process of a slow read of pleasure activism by Adrian Marie Brown. And in it she's talking about a lot of consent practices that have changed how I've thought about accountability as being less of a demand and more of a conversation. I wonder.

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Speaker 2

When.

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Speaker 1

You're working with folks and trying to either hold them accountable or have them think more about their impact on a space. Are there any tactics that you use or any advice that you give to folks?

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Speaker 2

I think a lot about values and I think about how they feel when they're being invited. And from there I try to work backwards with policies and practices that seem like they're in alignment with that value. And if I feel this alignment, I try to name it as in, Well, I know that you wanted people to feel this with a or I know that you wanted to embody this in this way, but the way that you work, how we operating is working against that.

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Speaker 2

How can we address it?

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Speaker 1

So I okay, that's genius. There's so many parts of that that I also just want to highlight. I am autistic and find creating scripts for things so useful. So that script of like, I know you wanted this, this is happening because of this and if you still want that, what are we going to do? And bringing them into that conversation is such a beautiful way to navigate that.

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Speaker 1

I also love the like strength based or values based approach that you bring into these conversations. And I think that that is something I'm starting to see on a leadership level with some strategic planning conversations I've been a part of. I'm wondering for folks who are not at a leadership level, if they are trying to advocate for changes within their communities, if there's anything that you find successful in that kind of a community.

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Speaker 1

And can I explain that a little bit more so rather than going to the manager and saying, Hey, this was the impact that this had, what are you going to do to fix this or to address this environment that we have created? Instead going to peers and saying, Hey, I noticed that you aren't offering assistive listening devices on your tours, dot, dot, dot, knowing that that person is not probably being compensated as well as a leader or might have other frustrations that they have going on, I find it to be a little bit scarier when it's someone who doesn't feel like they are as responsible for making the space as accessible as it should be,

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Speaker 1

but still has an impact on the space being as accessible as it should be and could be.

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Speaker 2

That is a tricky one. That's definitely a tricky one. And in that case, I probably wouldn't start with the peer. I would probably start with someone who has decision making power and what I like to do is act on the level of belief. So if I can get someone to believe that access is integral, that disability justice is integral, then I don't have to work so much on the behaviors because the alignment will start to come together at the level of belief.

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Speaker 2

If that makes sense.

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Speaker 1

It does, I think. Do you have language that you use for navigating that for going from Billy?

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Speaker 1

I'm just so excited because I haven't heard anyone else talk about it like that before, and I just think it's so smart.

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Speaker 2

It's actually I'm talking about this as if it's one conversation, but actually it is many, many converse patients over time. And it can be hard and it can be frustrating to always be that person. And that's why I recommend getting outside emotional support while you continue to chip away at that. I've never really like tried that she laid this out as an as an actual strategy.



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Speaker 2

I, I, I'm commenting on on the way that I approach things in the past but I don't have a how to you on on how to make that happen.

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Speaker 1

Yeah and I think that me trying to make it into a how to is also just the way that my brain personally thinks and me being excited by these prospects. But I think the point that you bring up of the like the need for emotional support outside of the space that you're advocating in is so important and so complicated because I also don't think it should be a requirement for us to need that emotional support outside of work.

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Speaker 1

But it really is, especially in our current just society. I think that as kind of we start wrapping up this conversation, is there any advice that you might give to folks who are trying to figure out how to make either holding people accountable or being held accountable a more sustainable practice that doesn't require so much? Whatever the the motion that I'm making of like ripping out your inside, whatever that word is like, how do you make accountability not feel like that, but instead feel like, huh, like a lightning or a giving to others that got real like in my actor body right there.

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Speaker 1

So let me know if you need words.

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Speaker 2

Yes, I'm also autistic here, so if you could just restate that real quick, that would be so helpful.

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Speaker 1

Any final thoughts or advice for folks listening to this conversation and wanting something to like think on afterwards?

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Speaker 2

I think two pieces of advice. One, if you're in and within a cultural institution, I would get familiar with the organizational structure just for your knowledge and to cut down, you know, when when things get too intense, who do I go to for that or who handles that or, you know, whose role is that? And also, if I would also take another look at the mission, vision and then values for your cultural institution and to kind of reflect on if we were really, really doing this, what would things look like, feel like sound like tastes like smell what you know, are there places where we're doing really well and are there places, you know, in

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Speaker 2

this institution where this kind of passing practices, this underdeveloped? And how can we strengthen these organizational muscles?

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Speaker 1

Oh, yeah. And I think that also brings in that creative aspect of like, let's think about accountability. What are the senses? How does that feel? Which I love? And then the only thing that I also want to just offer up to folks is, again, this work is a little bit soul crushing sometimes. I just really want folks to know that when they're advocating, they're not alone in that.

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Speaker 1

They're also probably not the first person that had this idea and they will not be the last. So advocating and trying to hold people accountable, although it takes time and is complicated, is going to make it so much nicer for like your children, your cousins, the younger generations. And sometimes when things feel just so hard, I, I start thinking about it like if I, if I were a friend, like, what?

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Speaker 1

What kindness would I want to give to myself? What kindness would I want someone to give to me? And then I just I'm a little bit gentler with myself and with the people that I'm holding accountable for things. And I think that that gentleness and grace is not weakness. It's actually incredible strength. And it makes this work much more human and much more accessible for everybody involved.

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Speaker 1

Any final thoughts? I know, I know we're kind of wrapping up, but any final thoughts from you?

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Speaker 2

I mean, my final thought and this accountability conversation is it's an honor and a responsibility to bring people across the threshold into what you're doing. So the question is, what are you inviting them to? What is the invitation? And is there something funky about the invitation that will prevent people from fully participating? I mean, if you had a dinner party, you wouldn't have your guests sit on the floor, you would have silverware, you would have plates, you would have glasses, you would hopefully consider people's dietary needs, you know, like so I would think about it like if I was like, think about it as I was letting someone to dinner and they are my honored guest. So how how is that dinner going to go? How am I planning for that dinner?

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Speaker 1

I love that. Also, the more dinners you throw because I'm really rolling with this analogy here, the more dinners that you throw.

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Speaker 1

The more information you have, the more silverware, the more plates, all of that. So you continue to do better. And I trust that everyone is doing their best. And that also makes things a lot easier and makes me a lot more patient and understanding, which I'm not a very patient person. So I find that helpful to.