

Pigeonhole Episode 26

[bright ambient music]

Introduction

CHORUS OF VOICES: Pigeonholed, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole.

CHERYL: One of my responses to fear and stress is that my creative drive goes away. There wasn't even a podcast the last two months. Sandi Yi and Katharine Houpt to the rescue. They created an online exchange. I signed up for it in hopes that some artist somewhere might help me slowly light my creative fire again. But when I got paired with Sandie, it spontaneously blossomed into some needlepoint and...this podcast. [ambient music very slowly fades away]

It start...it started.... It started with a Facebook message. [mouse click] [gasps] You messaged me with five exclamation points! And asked if I wanted virtual care, that you were facilitating an online care exchange.

SANDIE: It is Disability Culture Crip & Ally Care Exchange, C A C E, for Crip Ally Care Exchange.

CHERYL: [mouse clicking] I clicked on the link you sent, and then there was a questionnaire.

SANDIE: And my collaborator, Katharine, and I call it "cake," instead of like "case!"

CHERYL: And the idea is that after filling out the questionnaire with some stuff about you and what you want, that you would pair one disabled person and one artist ally. And then those two people would speak on the phone or use video or text-based chat.

The Exchange

[bouncy ambient music fades in]

SANDIE: CACE exchange will be making like a recipe for something that you share, like collaborative effort, but then write it into a recipe in the end. Almost like baking cakes, and it's like food as nutrient. But it also means it's like care and love and attention. We're cake. [bouncy music fades away]

So, in the form you will see that you self-identify as a disabled person, artist, or other identity categories, or allies. So, you can be many of the categories. And we do ask people like, what do you hope to get out of this experience? And what are your access needs?

[voice bounces between left speaker, right speaker, and both, slightly overlapping itself through the next paragraph]

People tell us that, hey, I want to pair up with another disabled person. Or like, hey, I'm open. I'm interested in pairing up with someone who is interested in writing. Some people may say that, hey, really want someone who also share experiences with being a mad person. I know that someone was saying that they want to know more about disability culture, so I pair up this person with someone who has more experiences in disability community. Questions such as like, are you pairing up like one disabled person with a non-disabled ally? Not necessarily. It's not like only disabled people can do the care work. It's very much about like, how do we play our role?

CHERYL: You provided prompts of things that we could do in our own spaces from a distance, but with each other. And then you wanted us to share something of the collaboration, taking a picture of each other or selfies of the computer screen. And then it was gonna be shared on social media, which is such a cool way to take advantage of what crips are already doing, which is working at home, a lot of the time. And the other thing that crips are always doing also is asking each other, "What care would you like, and what care can I give you?"

[ethereal ambient music plays through next section as voice bounces between left speaker, right speaker, and both]

SANDIE: Crip: Family, siblings, connections, culture. Ally: Hmm...providing space. Entering into disability culture. Support, care, being attentive, holding a space. Cheryl, are you still online? [pause] Oh, no. Oh, no! The train is going past by my apartment right now. Hello?! Oh, no. I might have to disconnect this again.... All right. Join the call. Join. OK.

Care: Creating a space, even if it's like a virtual space, like what we have right now. It's also holding a space. [music very slowly fades away] Care can also mean being attentive, invitation of the unknown. Very much like [laughing] what you and I are doing right now! Yeah. I think care is not always about having like a soothing feeling. A lot of time, care can come from the need to feel displaced, angry or just like, no, I'm not OK. And then you're not trying to make me okay by saying that, "No worries! Everything's gonna be fine." Like a lot of time, it's not what people need.

Exchange. It doesn't have to be like equal. It does not mean that like, oh, you're going to make a picture for me, and I will make a picture for you. Exchange is complicated and has a lot of complexity that we really need to look at or we can look at.

[dreamy piano music plays through this paragraph] Like, for example, Prompt 1 for the CACE kit: if you want to rest in your chair or on your couch or in your bed, whoever the partner is, you are encouraged to grab like a pencil or a pen and just began like drawing this person's presence. It can be eyes, nose, face, body. But it can also be imaginative lines that you're seeing, witnessing this person. Whatever this exchange means to the partners, they get to decide what goes into the content as exchange. And it's like something that, you know, you have my consent. I have your consent. So, exchange, for me, is very much about consent. Consent to give care and consent to receive.

CHERYL: So, this was prompted by the pandemic, but this is not new, is it?

SANDIE: Yeah. So, I see like a lot of my friends, my colleagues were freaking out about the huge changes. And it is huge. But I think well, this is a lot of disabled people's everyday reality before this pandemic. And I think a lot of disabled people and activists have talked about it in the past, like, I would say a month. Wait, has it been a month? Because I feel OK, my timeline is totally not altogether. [laughs] I'm not denying people's fear or feeling anxious. And I don't put it lightly when I say that, well, this is what disabled people have done for ages. It's like, unfortunately, this has been the norm.

I want connections. I want connections with my people, like my crip siblings. And I'm really reminded of [Riva Lehrer's work](#). So, Riva did Circle Stories many years ago, and she continues making portraits of her people: so, disabled people, queer people, and artists. I have been thinking a lot about, yeah, what do disabled people look like right now? Especially when we are all sheltered in place. And hopefully, everyone is doing it correctly. [laughs] How do we share to each other, among crips, that this is what disability looks like? Which is also a project that Bethany Stephens did: [This Is What Disability Looks Like](#),

where she asked people to take pictures of themselves or having pictures taken and really show like, hey, this is me. This is what I look like. And I am a disabled person. I am a disabled person of color, and I'm queer.

So, I was Sins Invalid artist-in-residence a couple years ago or many years ago. Working with other disabled artists during the residency, and also I interned for Sins Invalid for one summer, it gave me a lot of like long-lasting energy to do the care work, to build connections. And I feel that the work that many people have done, like Alice Wong, Patty Byrne and Leroy and Mia Mingus, yeah, these people's work is how we can begin collecting crip styles. Disability and crip, it's like they're styles. And care can come from various styles, approaches. Definitely, I open to other definitions of what care looks like, especially during pandemic, such as what we are going through right now.

[bouncy electronica returns and plays through the end] When we don't see the representations of ourselves in the media, we make it work. We make it happen. We capture that ourselves. It's about how to carry our heritage. Disability culture, crip culture: It is a heritage that I want to preserve and conserve. That's the basic background, the idea behind this project.

CHERYL: On Facebook, it's [facebook.com/DisabilityCultureCACE](https://www.facebook.com/DisabilityCultureCACE), and on Instagram [@DisabilityCulture_CACE](https://www.instagram.com/DisabilityCulture_CACE).

SANDIE: So, it is CripAllyCareExchange@gmail.com.

Well, you and I will have to take selfie with our screens, so!

CHERYL: Yes!

SANDIE: [laughs] So, I should stop and then send it to you.

Wrap-up

[upbeat theme music]

CHERYL: Every episode is transcribed. Links, guest info, and transcripts are all at www.whoamitostopit.com, my disability arts blog. I'm Cheryl, and...

TWO VOICES: this is Pigeonhole.

CHERYL: Pigeonhole: Don't sit where society puts you.

Music in the episode

"[Drone People](#)" and "[2:00 AMbient](#)" by Chuzausen. (Source: freemusicarchive.org. Licensed under [a Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike License](#)) and "[Threnody](#)" by Soularflair. (Source: freemusicarchive.org. Licensed under [a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 License](#)).