John OBrien 0:05
Welcome to KUOW’s *Speakers Forum*. I'm your host, John O'Brien.

In this episode, according to the Centers for Disease Control, one in four adults in the United States, that's 61 million people, live with a disability.

JO: 0:23
Those include people with mobility, cognition, independent living, hearing, and vision disabilities. People living with disabilities have had to fight for their humanity and civil rights in the face of stigmatization, shame, bias and discrimination.

JO: 0:44
They've done so by challenging negative attitudes and stereotypes, and rallying for political and institutional change. In the 1970s, they lobbied Congress and marched on Washington, ultimately establishing protections for the first time with the Rehabilitation Act.

JO: 1:05
A more comprehensive bill, the Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990. That law was intended to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability and ensure equal treatment and equal access to employment opportunities, and public accommodations. In this episode of *Speakers Forum*, we hear from two activists who carry on efforts to empower people with disabilities, continuing the fight for recognition, inclusion, and equal rights.

JO: 1:41
Shayda Kafai is the author of *Crip Kinship: The Disability Justice & Art Activism of Sins Invalid.* She speaks here with author Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha.

JO: 1:58
Protective laws are one step in establishing wider freedoms, but they do not wipe away cultural assumptions and stereotypes. People with disabilities still face prejudice, physical barriers, and lack of affordable health care. They continue to fight to be seen as equals in societies that often other them.

JO: 2:24
This program was presented on January 13, 2022 by the Seattle Public Library, and the Elliott Bay Book Company.

JO: 2:33
Please note, this recording contains unedited language of an adult nature. Here, Elliott Bay's Karen Maeda Allman introduces the conversation.

Karen Maeda Allman 2:47
It's a particular honor tonight to host two luminaries whose words, performances, mentoring, and community building and activism is crucial to, I would say, crucial to our survival. Shayda Kafai is the author of *Crip Kinship* and is an assistant professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona. As a queer mad femme of color, she commits to enacting the many ways we can reclaim our bodyminds from intersecting systems of oppression. She was a 2020 inductee into the National

Disability Mentoring Coalition's Susan Daniel's Disability Mentoring Hall of Fame. You may have seen her TED talk, ‘The Language of Madness’ or read her moving personal essay on *Live Through This.* She lives in Pomona, California with her wife Amy.

KMA 3:44

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha is a disabled, autistic, non-binary, femme writer, performance artists and cultural worker of Berger, Tamil, Sri Lankan and Irish Roma ascent. The author or co-editor of nine books, including *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities*, and also the classic *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice.* And more recently, *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories From the Transformative Justice Movement* co edited with Ejeris Dixon. As a lead artist with sins in invalid since 2009, they are a 2020 Disability Futures Fellow, a five-time finalist for Publishing Triangle Awards, and the 2020 winner of the Lambda Literary Foundation’s Jeanne Córdova Prize for Lesbian and Queer Nonfiction. And this is a major award given to a writer committed to nonfiction work that captures the depth and complexity of lesbian queer life, culture and or history. And tonight, they’ll discuss Shayda Kafai’s

KMA 5:00
book *Crip Kinship, the Disability Justice & Art Activism of Sins Invalid.* This was published just a few days ago by Arsenal Pulp Press. *Crip Kinship* is based on many years of scholarship, lived experiences and documentation of the art activism of Sins Invalid, a San Francisco Bay Area-based performance project and its radical imaginings of what disabled, queer, trans, and gender nonconforming bodyminds of color can do, how they can rewrite oppression, and how they can gift us with transformational lessons for our collective survival.

KMA 5:41
Grounded in their Disability Justice framework *Crip Kinship* investigates the revolutionary survival teachings that disabled queer of color community offers to all of our bodyminds, and Shayda Kafai invites us to read this book with care and I hope you'll do so. And I mentioned it earlier, but I should I think I'd like to say it again that Leah has also been a lead artist with Sins Invalid since 2009.

KMA 6:12
Um. This is a book of tremendous insight, heart, and revolutionary spirit. Thank you both for speaking with us tonight.

Shayda Kafai: Hello! Um, Leah. Should we do a quick like image description of us and space before we get started?

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: Sure. I think so. Hi, I'm Leah. I use she and they pronouns. Um. I have kind of faded… This is like chocolate plum. I think it's like purple, white, brown, curly hair on one side of my head.

LLPS: 6:43

I kind of have like light skin, mixed-race person in winter skin. So it's kind of ecru right now. I'm in Seattle, if you're here, you know, we get four hours of sunlight, maybe. But we actually didn't get any today. I've got rose gold aviator glasses and these really amazing pom-pom earrings that are red, and I'm wearing a white crop top. And I think that's it. I'm so happy to be here. Oh, my background is turquoise. Yeah.

SK: 7:12
I love that you… Chocolate plum just sounds delicious. Hi, everyone.

SK: 7:19
I have short, black, like pixie hair. I'm wearing actual fake earrings today.

SK: 7:28
I have pink lipstick, and a long, um, black shirt. And I'm sitting in my aunt and uncle's living room. And they have like, a silvery beige couch with like glittery silver pillows on it.

SK: 7:43
And I'm like, just ridiculously happy to be here. I needed this conversation that I know we're gonna have today. And it's so good to see your face.

LLPS: So good to see your face too. Where do you want to start?

SK: 7:59
We could start… I mean, when I was thinking about today, and I was thinking about worldwise, but, but my own worldwise. Like what I needed. I was really thinking about rest and dreaming. So, especially you're writing about dreaming and you know, queer crip dreaming. And so we could start there.

SK: 8:28
I could read a little excerpt. Or we can just talk about like, Hey, how did we first, when did we learn about Sins Invalid? Like maybe we do the crip timeline, when did we learn about Sins Invalid? What was like, how did it impact us? Maybe that's a good place for folks maybe, um, to get grounded.

LLPS: Yeah, totally. I would love to start there. I know… I'm so hungry for your words. So if you if you felt like you want to share an excerpt maybe a little bit later on. I would love that. And also, we can just, you know, take it easy and see how it goes.

SK: Perfect. Cool.

LLPS: Um, do you want me to tell my Sins Invalid origin story, or do you want to start?

SK: I would love to because there's like an excerpt of it for like, a conversation we had in 2010 in the book, so if you… Oh, yeah, this is for folks that are, like, this is like a very long, slow project. So yeah, if you want to share how did you come to their work? Yeah.

LLPS: Oh, my God. Yeah, I was gonna be like, it's been 11 years. Yeah, it's a disabled writing process. It takes that long.

SK: Yeah.

LLPS: Um, okay, so my Sins Invalid origin story was that, I moved to Oakland, California in 2007 from Toronto to go to graduate school to get my MFA in creative writing. And also because it was like, I knew it was queer and trans people of color art-central. like it felt like queer paradise.

LLPS: 10:00
At the time. And when I moved to the Bay, I had been pretty out about being disabled and mad in Toronto. And when I moved to Toronto in… when I was, you know, in my early 20s, I was very visibly crazy and very sick. And, you know, I couldn't even hide it. And so even as I kind of went out of a crisis period that I was in, in my early 20s, you know, people knew my story.

LLPS: And then when I came to the Bay, I kind of went back into the closet for a while, because I just… There are a lot of reasons. I mean, partly, I left a place that was pretty inaccessible, and pretty cold, and, you know, all these kinds of things. And all of a sudden, I was in California, and it was sunny. And there was really cheap organic food, and I quit smoking cigarettes, and I kind of had a remission of some of my physical disability symptoms. And there was also a way that I just wanted to be, I wanted to be a cool kid, like I wanted to be with all the other queer and trans folks of color I knew none of whom identified as disabled. And, you know, it was just this very decadent kind of time of like, all of these working class, queer and trans artists of color, going to three shows a week and go to all these $3 dance clubs and things like that. And I never talked about, you know, I'm kind of whisper it, but I didn't talk about being disabled. And I still was disabled. But at the time, um.

LLPS: 11:29
There were very few people still who I knew who were talking about disability who weren't white. Right? Like I was aware that there was this history in the bay. You know, people always talk about, oh, the East Bay, Berkeley, you know, it's the birthplace of the disability rights movement. But the people I knew, for the most part, who were telling the stories were white. And I was just like, that's not my world. I hardly talk to any white people. And, um. But then I remember hearing about Sins Invalid, and I was like, seeing the flyers around and they were really well designed. And I was like, I remember like picking one up and I kind of hid it in my backpack. And that was for their show at Brava Theater in 2008. And I bought myself a ticket. And by the way, I at the time, myself and my collaborator, Terry Goulet, we had been running Mangoes with Chili, which at the time was a pretty big queer and trans people of color arts collective. We had a tour every year, we were really embedded in performance art. But I didn't tell any of the people I knew from Mangoes that I was going to Sins. And when I went I went by myself. Because I was kind of, I didn't say it out loud, but I was like, nobody can know I'm disabled.

LLPS: 12:35
And then I went and I was like. I just was sitting there with my jaw open even before the show started because I was like, like for people who don't know what Brava Theater is like a 200, maybe 300-seater feminist, feminists of color theater in the San Francisco Mission District. It's beautiful. It's large. And I didn't know I don't know what I expected. But I went there and I was like, God, the theater is full. And it's full of disabled people. And most

of them are not white and they're all flirting with each other. And I was just like…

SK: Oh my God.

LLPS: And I was like, this is just like, I've never seen anything like this and I felt like crying. And I felt myself breaking open. And you know, I've told the story a lot. Like that shows starts with um, so yeah, the curtain the red velvet curtain opens. And then

LLPS 13:24
Rodney and Seeley are doing this like disabled flirtation, race-play BDSM on thing on stage. I've never seen anything like it, my jaw dropped again. And then Rodney who is, you know, a Maori wheelchair dancer starts being slowly suspended in his chair, 40 feet off stage. And then there's this voiceover of Patty saying, Is this safe? Are you safe? Are you sufficiently insulated from us, the disabled, the deaf, the deviant? Or will you be tainted by our leaking needs? And I was like, ah!

LLPS 13:57
Um, so I was just like, I have never seen anything like this. And it's speaking to all of the stuff I've been moving around with my whole life that I have never heard anyone talk about. I’ve definitely never seen anyone do it in performance art. And I've definitely never seen anyone do it and performance art, that that is this high. Like in terms of like technical caliber, like, we're in a beautiful theater. It's accessible, disability-centralized, you know, Black and indigenous voices are like front and center on the stage. And basically my brain exploded. And I went… I was really transformed. And um, so that was my entry point. And then a year later, you know, Sins, like a lot of organization, you know, performance organizations, doesn't always do an open call for performers. And I know when I've talked to Patty and Leroy and other people who've been involved, they were like, well, you know, we're two disabled Black people. If we do an open call, we're going to get 10,000 submissions, we won't be able to sort them through. And we wanted to like. work with people we knew a little bit and we knew we could

LLPS 15:00
work together. But then that year was one of the… maybe the only years where they did an open call for submissions. So I sent some stuff in. And they were like, we want you to be in the show. And I was like, I just got so lucky. And…

LLPS 15:14
Um yeah, maybe I'll stop there. But that was my entry point. I can say more about what it was like working with them if you like.

SK: yeah.

LLPS: But I will just say this, it changed my life. Like there's lots of details that could give, but when I started working with them as a performer the next year, I had been doing poetry and performance and arts teaching and writing teaching and curation, for over 10 years at that point, and it was the first time that I've ever been in a performance space where we all did an access check-in. Every time. And I just was like uh, I’m fine. And then I saw it was like the first time I saw more-seasoned disabled artists saying without apology, this is what my access needs are. Because I was raised in a tradition of the show must go on. If you have an access need, well, tough-titty for you. Suck it up. You either show up and perform, or that's it. You're a flake, you know. We're not going to ask you again. It was the first performance space where there was food. Where Patty was like, oh, no, we're gonna work with you to develop your piece. And I was like, Oh, you mean I don't just have to show up and be perfect. Or you never invite me back. And they're like, no, we want to support you as a disabled artist of color. And I was like, these words are coming out of your mouth. I don't know what they mean.

LLPS: 16:23
And where there was money in the budget from the beginning for ASL, for wheelchair access. For… Where there's so much work done to make sure the theater was accessible, where they built, more and more access every year, you know. Where, you know, to be honest, at first, we weren't like… There wasn't such great access about fragrances and chemicals. But then there was a lot of work to be like, how do we do this and be black and brown, majority black and brown disabled artists with a majority black and brown audience, where we have a lot of cultural stuff about not smelling bad, and about how our hair products are very scented, and not just being like, you have to do this. But being like, here's how we actually make it accessible for, for everybody. Here's a list of black and brown hair products and skin products that are unscented, right? And you know, and really coming at it from that racialized position. Anyway, I should stop talking, but basically it changed my life and I went back to all the rest of my performance world, and I was like, I want to do it this way. And then a lot of the abled, you know, QT POC, queer and trans people of color performance community was kind of like…

LLPS 17:27
You know, and sorry one last thing I'll say, sorry, I'm famous.

SK: Please, no, don't apologize.

LLPS: I just, you know, I really credit Sins with, um, I had like, what, like two or three books out, you know, by the time that I started working with Sins, but I didn't talk about disability in any of them. And, you know, in the spoken word community I came up in there was a real sense of like, nobody gives a shit about this, it's a downer. Disability is depressing. Like, there's no disabled artists’ community, no one wants to hear about that. That's just sad. And, you know, Sins actually created a space where I was like, I can write about my experiences of disability. And, yeah, there can be, there can be sadness, because there's oppression in them, but people are hungry for this. And it freed me up to start, because it's like a chicken or the egg thing. Once I knew there was an audience and a space where I could write those stories, and they would be longed for, I could start writing them. And it's funny, because I mean, Karen was like, oh, care works, the classic care work wouldn't exist without Sins.

SK: Yeah.

LLPS: None of my writing for the past… What's that been? Um, yeah. 11 years would exist without Sins. It literally changed the world. Okay, I'm gonna shut up now, what was your entry point?

SK 18:41
I love how your description of your entry point was… Um. I kind of felt like the outward like going out there seeing it, experiencing. And I did not get to go and see a performance until like, I think it was 2011.

LLPS: Yeah.

SK: So my entry point was more this way. I was looking for, I had a sense of understanding of my queerness and my disability at that point. And they were like, Hey, you have to write about something for your dissertation. And I was like, cool. You know, people of color queer people of color, trans queer people of color, but I want them to be disabled. And I was looking for performance projects.

SK 19:33
And I wasn't finding any and one of my friends who grew up in San Francisco was like, Sins Invalid and I was like, Who is Sins Invalid? And so like, my first entry point was like my bed, in my like studio apartment, my computer. Let me watch your, like, I saw your performance online and there's like a few other really, really phenomenal excerpts.

LLPS 20:01
You saw me masturbating on stage like everybody who watched that piece on YouTube. Yep.

SK: Yes I did. Yep. For pain management. Yeah. Yeah. And I was like, what this is amazing. And I'm glad that you put their website in the chat. So folks, if you haven't been to their website yet, you can log on and you can see excerpts. Um. Yeah, and so that was the first time that I was able to see kind of similar to you, this permissibility, about talking about our bodyminds. Talking about the needs that we might have without shame. And coming from an immigrant background, like we don't talk about need in that same context. Coming from an academic background, we for sure, don't talk about need. In fact, leave your body and mind like outside the classroom and like come into the classroom, right. And so it felt like a very revolutionary way to talk about our bodymind experiences. And then after that, I was like, Okay, you are an anxious person, but you are going to reach out and you're going to email Patty Berne, and just like, see what happens. And so, um. And then Patty connected me to you and connected me to Leroy and Seeley Quest and other amazing folks. And so those like, initial conversations then grew into, I have funding now I can go down there and visit.

SK 21:33
And yeah, it was the most cross-disability space, but also like, Patty introduced me to this really phenomenal term called crip-centric liberated zones.

LLPS: Yeah.

SK: And when I heard that I was like, fabulous, like, I want to live there, like what is a crip-centric liberated zone? And there's a whole chapter devoted to it, because it's this really remarkable community-built place, love place, Where queer trans gender nonconforming disabled folks of color, where we can go to relearn ourselves outside of oppression.

LLPS: Oh, I love that.

SK 22:14
Yeah. And I was like, okay, so this is a love practice. Like, how do we make these spaces? And I mean, my first Sins Invalid show was also at the Brava. And by the time I went, there was a room, a quiet room. Which my like, anxiety mad brain was, like, all about? Yes, we all got the email that this is a scent-free space. You know, there was a gender-neutral restroom, there were roomy seats for all bodies. I mean, there were so many access points. And it was a very humbling emotional experience to go somewhere, and to realize that your needs were met. You know, like, that's so simple, but it was such a mind-blowing moment.

SK 23:12
And then I was like, okay, so this, this project was written about in one way, for a dissertation because it had to be. And I was like, Okay, so now we're going to really just reframe it and have, have y'all tell your story, and have this be written for community. But yeah, that was my origin story.

LLPS 23:35
Oh my god. Wow, there's so much that's just popping in my brain off of what you said, like that. The space where we relearn to love ourselves, that's so beautiful, and what else?

LLPS 23:47
There's something we know when you were describing going to the theater, and it being that space of like, multiple points of access. Something that I'm also remembering was that, well, it came up when you were like, it's so simple, but it's so not because how often do we get all of those forms of access? And I was like, right. And then the other thing was that, um, well, two things. One, what was mixed-in with there is that like, it wasn't kind of sterile, off-white begrudging access, like it was very sensual. And it was very beautiful.

SK: Yes.

LLPS: And it was a space of a lot of pleasure and decadence. And I think that that's something that Sins really modeled, that's also, you know. Like, 15 years since the invention of the term Disability Justice when people were like, Oh, what is DJ and there's some confusion about it. I think that's one thing that sometimes gets lost is that, you know, Disability Justice is a revolutionary, disabled, black and brown centered, anti-capitalist practice. And it's also a practice it's about like rich, disabled pleasure, right? Because so often, as disabled people were told, well, either you can be, you know, like the normal people and

LLPS 25:00
be able to go sit with the big kids in the restaurant if you just pretend that you're not disabled and erase your disability.

SK: yes.

LLPS: Or if you can't do that, the access you're going to get is like the ugly toilet seat. Like the ugly grab bar, you know. It's going to be very minimal. And you're, you're supposed to be grateful for that bare minimum that you get. And whereas with Sins, it was like, no, no, this is going to be a, you know, nutritionally accessible free buffet served to you on red velvet seats, with a quiet room, and ASL and, you know, access ushers, and, you know, really good interpretation that is working around performance. And it's just this feast. And it's also going to do things… This is a little bit of a side note, but I think that's like something I've seen a lot as a cultural worker is that anytime an oppressed group starts creating our own media, right, there's this idea that oh, what people need are these like positive role models. So sometimes what comes out, Dorothy Allison's written about this, along with a lot of other people. Sometimes, like, what the expectation is, oh, we're gonna tell these very simple positive stories that are like, yay! And what Sins did was actually like, No, we're gonna do a lot of really complicated shit that's beautiful and gorgeous, and also tell some really hard stories, but we need them to be told. And they're going to be told with beautiful lighting, and acting and sound and interpretation. And there's also going to be stuff that pushes you, right? Like I'm thinking about, I think it was around probably, I want to say 2011, when there was the show we did that were, we were really engaging with topics of eugenics, where there's a whole theme, then of this repeating theme, talking about Carrie [sic] Bell, who was a young white southern woman with Down Syndrome who was forcibly sterilized. And the case Buck vs. Bell, in the US Supreme Court is really notorious in the disability world because it was a Supreme Court case that, you know, was at the center of legalizing eugenicist… eugenics and forced sterilization of disabled people.

LLPS 27:06 And in our show, Carrie Buck spoke and had a voice and was acted by Seeley who's a trans actor. And there was lots of stuff about Carrie having a right to a sexuality, a right to parent, you know, a right to make her own family. And that was a tough piece of performance art, but it touched on, I think everyone in the audience had their own relationship to being told, Oh, you shouldn't have been born or you shouldn't reproduce, or you don't have a right to be desired, no matter what our disability is. So that was there. And then it was mixed in with like, you know, god, I remember Patty was like, that was the year that me and E.T. Russian, did our crip sex moments. Um, you know. We had like six different pieces that we worked on together. And Patty was like, Okay, guys, too depressing. So so you guys gotta bring the porn, and I was like, a lot of my stuff's really sad.

LLPS 28:00
But I mean, in any case, like we would have that intense, those intense pieces about eugenics and sterilization and the control of disabled women's bodies and sexualities, right, mixing with like, E.T. stroking their leg amputations and talking about jerking off their friend in their truck. Or me talking about like going on a date with somebody and how we canceled more than we went out on the actual date, but it was really hot and, and things like that. And I think that there's, in terms of the project of learning how to relove ourselves, I think that there's a way that along with a simple sensuality, there's a richness of disabled experience that we're not often allowed to have access to. Where it's like, it can be the hard things that we are telling on our own, in our own terms, and also our stories of sexuality and pleasure and sensuality that we're telling on our own terms, because as disabled p- people, we experience all of those at the same time. You know?

SK 28:57 Yeah, yeah. And I mean, I think it's an opening. Because when you talked about like, oh, the happy stories like those are the ones that we're supposed to be saying or hearing. And I thought immediately of Stella Young's TED talk on inspiration porn and how like, there is a restriction of narrative.

SK 29:17
But if we're storytelling from the bodymind outward, which is I think, one of the things that Sins Invalid gifted me with, or a strategy they gifted me with. And if we’re storytelling from crip-centric, liberated zones from a place where we are taught we can love and our bodies are worthy of love. Then yeah, space is created for… Thank you for sharing that link. Spaces are created for all the stories and I think in an interview early on, Leroy also shared with me that storytelling is activism. And a very important part of that telling is us telling the entire range of stories of our bodyminds, right not just the ones that were expected to tell that are rosy and happy. And I'm thinking a lot from what you said again, also about how the act of telling the story as a disabled, mad, chronically ill person is incredibly radical. And sometimes I think it's simplified. Like, there are so many other contexts in which me, myself, or others, like our bodies are told and spoken about by other people, never about ourselves. So even yeah, so like, okay, yes. The physician talking about our bodies, our psychiatrists talking about our bodies, etc. And so that like, pivot of No, actually Carrie's gonna speak, carry his voice and agency, all of those very intentional moments throughout.

SK 30:53
And when you were talking about like, the juiciness of crip-sex, I was I was thinking about Noemi Lambs most recent performance with a honey you know, and you know, just covering covering their body on stage with honey and singing. And there is a new, beautiful cripped-out sexual pleasure universe that Sins Invalid invites us into through all of these these moments, you know?

LLPS: Yeah, yeah. And I absolutely, I'm thinking about going back to what Leroy said about storytelling is political. You know, I think I've heard I probably a lot of people have heard that said, by different people a lot and sometimes it can come across as kind of like, sure, yeah, you told your story. But I want to talk specifically, oh, thank you so much, Ryan, for posting that link. Of Noemi's band. Um,

LLPS 31:54
I think an important point that I think about a lot in terms of like Sins’ place as one of the creation places of Disability Justice. I don't know, I haven't gotten this for a while. But I feel like for the like, I don't know, like, thinking back to like, 2009 to like, 2014, 15-ish, when I would be on the road, either kind of, I would be kind of we would do these kind of Sins-lite, l-i-t-e shows, because there were all these colleges that sort of being like covering the show, and then they'd be really confused. Because Patty and Leroy would be like, unless you have a $20,000, you cannot bring the whole show. Because you need to pay for access, and you know, bringing like nine to 12, disabled performers and entire, you know, sound and light crew to you know, wherever, Burbank, wherever it's… Okay. Burbank wouldn't be wouldn't be that expensive, but Maine, wherever, it's expensive. So we would do these shows that were great, but kind of surreal, where it would be like me and

Leroy at Harvard with like, a bunch of videos, and we would just do monologues and we'd be like, Yeah, this is kind of like the small version of the show. Um, but sometimes people would be like, Wait, so you, you're the one of the core organizations of Disability Justice, and you're a performance art troupe? And they would be like, what? And, because they'd be expecting, like, aren't you guys registering people to vote or something, like that's what a political organization is. And something I heard Patty's, I've heard Patty say, a lot over the years. And there's this one thing that she said that I quote a lot and I reference a lot when I think early on, I was like, yes, so how come performance art? and she just was like, you know, I have thrown a lot of workshops, and I've done a lot of trainings, for well-meaning people who want to, you know, give a shit about disability. And she's like, I could do a workshop and they'd all nod, or…

SK: Yes.

LLPS: Elizabeth! you did see the mini show, I remember that.

LLPS 33:48
She's like, we could do a workshop where everyone just nods their heads and forgets about it, or she's like, or, I can do a piece of performance art in three minutes that gets in their head, and it fucks with all of their dreams and nightmares about disability, and just, you know, devastates them basically, and changes on the level where stories enter into us, which is the soul, which is the subconscious. And I think that that's true for both abled, you know, viewers, and also for disabled viewers who would be like, Whoa, holy shit. I didn't know. I've never I didn't know you could put a story like that on stage. And that's mine. And I'm, it's turning me inside out. Like, that's what happened with me. And so I think sometimes when people are like, what is Disability Justice? I mean, there's a million ways to answer that question. But I think that there's a reason why… And in some ways this is this is one of the things that I think really differentiates us from the disability rights movement is that…

LLPS 34:41
Um, storytelling and cultural work and performance art and poetry is so central to our work. And I think that even when I see waves of DJ now where there's like, so much Disability Justice on Instagram. You know, there's so many like cute pictures and like images and like, or even I'm thinking about um, Disabled and Here, which is this disabled queer and trans people of color clip art project that came out of Portland where there's just like different photographs and comic images of like really sweet, disabled, queer and trans black and brown people like getting a coffee, hanging out, like sleeping together, where I'm like that that's a possibility model for how you can live a disabled, joyful, life. And I think that's a lot of the work we're doing and that like what you said about like, a space to liberate ourselves through learning how to loving ourselves in a different way. And that's where the creative self gets in. And I want to be clear, I'm not saying that the disability rights movement didn't have cultural work, because it absolutely did. But I just do see a distinction, especially in terms of when I entered into Sins' work and Disability Justice work, where there was more of an emphasis coming from Disability Rights as I experienced it on policy and laws. And like, let's do this kind of Civil Rights Framework, versus the more community based cultural workspace that I suspend that a lot of other

Disability Justice folks doing. And I think that it's because as disabled black and brown, queer, and trans folks often we’re like, we don't trust the law, and we don't trust, like, the law, it's harm reduction. But it's not going to save us like us reaching to each other is going to be a lot of what saves us. And I've seen that storytelling especially like one of the biggest wins I see coming out of Disability Justice cultural work with Sins is absolutely at the center of it, is in the past 11 years, I just see so many more, especially younger, but not just younger, black and brown folks have so much less hesitancy in identifying as disabled. Whereas I felt like 10 years ago, I knew all these people who are like, I wouldn't call myself that. I mean, oh, but now I see, especially a lot of younger people be like, Yep, I'm disabled, I'm radical. I look hot. Let's go, like, let's fuck shit up. Whereas I think my generation or older, there was much more like, Oh, God, I can't afford to be out about my shit. And when I think about being out about my shit, the organized spaces, I see are so white and straight that I don't feel safe there. So, you know, what's, what's the point? Hi Sarah! Um.

SK 37:11
Yeah. I mean, when you said what is Disability Justice. So that was like the opening question of this whole thing. And it's like Disability Justice is need. And it's very much like, I want to be clear that I would not have the space and the ability to do what I do without Disability Rights, and the mainstream work that Disability Rights did. And at the same time, because so many people were left out, the main word that pops to my mind for what is Disability Justice. It's, it's created out of need. And I think about like - In thinking about Disability Justice, and Sins Invalid, I'm thinking of this beautiful lunch that Patty and Leroy had together at this cultural center called La Pena in San Francisco, where they were like, we're, we're beautiful, juicy, hot, amazing humans. And we have amazing thoughts, and we create amazing work. We need to have a place for this. Like, I think that's exactly maybe word for word, what Patty said like, we need a place. Let's make our own place. And so I feel like need facilitates so much of the cultural work.

SK 38:20
And then the spaces that are created from it. It's all this beauty that comes from that seedling of need. And also that seedling of kinship. And do we get in community? And yeah, like, I feel you. I have so many more students now who are open about not just their disabilities, but about their access needs. Yeah, it’s, it's our beginning of the semester ritual, I will tell you what my access needs are. Um. And then everybody else is invited to share as we go on, because it's just, if there's one thing that I'm noticing open, it's that claiming of identity.

LLPS 39:00
And that was something that we always said, we were like, I mean, at least with me, I was like, I need the ableds and the normals to care. Because there's a lot of us, but I'm just like, I mean, period, and I was like, I'm sick of the disabled people being the only ones to do the disabled work, right. Like we can use some help. You know? Also, I was like, I'm really pragmatic. I want us all not to die, and we could really just really win a lot faster if y'all would get on board. So, um, it's been cool seeing some movement that way. I remember a story that Stacey Park Milbern said when it was like a year or two into Trump, and it was one of his attempts to destroy DACA. And there was this rally in downtown Oakland. And there were these very

young undocumented organizers who, right at the beginning… You know, it made us both cry because we were like, we had 10 years of trying to get non-disabled organizers to do stuff like this and we, it took a lot of work and often they were just like, nope, forget it.

LLPS 40:00
But they're like, Yep, we've got chairs in the front. And when the march starts, we're going to move the pace of everyone who's in a chair, everyone who walks slowly, everyone who has kids, they're going to leave the march. And I was like, I'm crying. And then also, there was a moment where they were like, great. So we're gonna hold the sage aloft, but we're not going to light it because we know that some people have asthma. And I was like, this such a huge moment that we've been working towards. Because as you know, Black, brown indigenous people, we know that different herbs and medicines have been so important to our political and cultural practices. And often we were the disabled, Black, brown indigenous people who were like, hey, some of these, the way we're doing them make the space inaccessible for some of us. So can we have the medicines present, but do it in an accessible way. And the 16-year-olds were just right there. And they were like, if the revolution is not accessible, it's not the revolution and Stacey was texting me like, are you seeing this?

SK: Yeah!

LLPS 40:53
And I was like, oh it kind of worked? We all still might die, but Okay, great, like the organizing paid off. And, um, that's really hope giving for me. And oh, yeah, I'm seeing you. Hi. Nice to see you. Sorry, I'm waving at the chat. Um, Shayda I'm just realizing we have 12 minutes left till we go to wrap because…

SK: No!

LLPS: Yeah, it's 6:48.

SK: Oh, my goodness. I mean, yeah, I want to be generous and like, open with the time and like, invite folks to ask questions if they have any. But oh, my goodness, that went by so fast.

LLPS: Yeah. So people have been, you know, waiting with bated breath to ask us something about Sins or about anything, please do.

SK 41:37
You know, in our like, as people are typing in our email back and forth, one of the things that you asked me about, were just like, what are our Disability Justice dreams?

LLPS 41:48
And we do have a question, and it's kind of a big one. Can I just say it real quick?

SK: Oh, please. Yes.

LLPS: Nafisa asked ‘How would you go about creating a space like Sins Invalid?’ Sorry I didn't want to cut you off that I was like, that might take a lot of 10 minutes?

SK: Oh, yeah. Okay. Yes. I will say a few things. And then the first thing that popped into my head was…

LLPS 42:16
Oh Nafisa said, but please Shayda finish your thought.

SK 42:19
Okay. I was just going to say that the first text that came to mind that can be used as guidepost. And, you know, loving communally created instruction manual of sorts, is Sins Invalids’ *Disability Justice Primer.* And, Leah, if I anticipate I think you're going to check the link in the chat. Thank you.

SK 42:43
And it's this phenomenal second edition book. And so from the, the stage of first to second edition, Sins Invalid reached out to community organizers, cultural workers, and said, Hey, like, what are the conversations that we need to have that maybe we missed in the first text. But it's the first primer that not only talks about, what is Disability Justice? It gives a history of it, a timeline of Disability Justice, and then says, okay, and now what do we do with these principles? Like, how can they work in organizing spaces? So that's the first thing that popped into my head.

LLPS 43:20
Yeah, I love that. Um, so I just, I found it and I put the link to the book in the chat. And I would just say, um, I think that's a great place to start on. There's also I'm thinking about Carolyn Lazard, who's an amazing, queer Haitian disabled artist. They have, I think it’s just called *Accessibility in the Arts*. Shayda, if you want to look it up, while I'm talking, we could put it in the chat.

SK: Yes. I'm on it. Yes.

LLPS 43:45
Um, I think that the, so when I heard that question, I… My first thought was start where you are, you know, I think that this is one thing that's so beautiful, that I see about disability arts just blossoming over the last 12 years is that, like, we just keep… It doesn't have to look any one way. Like, I think that access is central. But I think that every community, you know, every space that you're a part of, you know, every community that you're a part of, you're going to know what the needs are. Right? So I feel like, you know, it doesn't have to look exactly like Sins. And Sins, you know, has changed over time where, you know, it went from like, the first show that I think was at like the LGBT community center to like a bigger theatrical show to the last performance they did, which because of COVID pivoted towards being all on film and video, right? And they actually have,

LLPS 44:35
Oh god, I forget if it's a blog post or a video about the making of that show, but it's called Loving with Three Hearts. And it talks about, like, how they had cameras in three different cities performed, like filming performers and

splicing it together. So those are some ways but I just think about, um, you know, it makes me think about like disabled folks I know, like ET years ago in Seattle started a thing called “Crip Your Hangout” where they just were like, yeah, there's no

LLPS 45:00
organized disabled space that I know of in Seattle. So I just want disabled people to hang out once a month. And I think about people who do disabled reading series on Zoom, or I think about people who, you know, start kind of a thing really, like, make kind of like a… Oh God, like, I don't know how to describe it, but like, you know, like write one page on a journal and then mail it to the next person and they write a next next thing and they, and it gets passed around. I just think that like, I guess that the Too Long Didn't Read is like, really think about what your dreams and desires are and what your community's dreams and desires are. And also, don't be afraid to ask and start where you are, and know that it can be a smaller thing than a lavish once a year performance. Like it can be a reading series. It can be a reading circle, it can be like getting together and making disabled art. I work with a disability and intersectionality summit, and I just did the tech, which is not my strong suit, last week for this workshop we did that was a bunch of disabled zine makers out of Hamilton, Ontario. Zine team, and they were talking about making a zine as disabled and deaf and sick and mad students during COVID. And their different disabled art practices where they're like, Yeah, we were like, it can be sloppy, it can be messy, it can be quick, it can be not permanent. And I was like, I think there's something to be said for making lavishly beautiful, well-produced disabled art. And I also think there was something I loved when they were like, we just do these quick writing hangouts together. And it's wonderful. Because if we, if the stakes are too high, we're all like, young and kind of freaked out and in COVID, and disabled, and we wanted to just start creating the space. So um, yeah, all those things, all those things. And yes, and thank you so much for putting the links in the chat Shayda.

SK: Of course.

LLPS: And Nafisa, Thank you for the question.

LLPS 46:47
Um, we have six minutes. Oh, wait, are there other questions? Yes. Um, Jeanette says, ‘Hi, Shayda, what would you say is your favorite chapter of the book and why?’

SK 46:59
Hello, Jeanette. You know, I think one of my favorite chapters is the last one. And it's called “Manifesting our Collective Futures.” And I like this as, as one of my favorite chapters because it thinks about Sins Invalid’s work and the call of dream making and manifesting crude futures that they're tasking us with and imagines what things would look like continuing that work. And I remember, in 2020,

SK 47:37
Movement Generation did a an online series of like, we're imagining that it's the year 2050. And the, the webinar link should still be on YouTube. But let's imagine it's 2050. And then they did check-ins with different social justice

workers. And Patty was on from 2050, as a Disability Justice activist, and was kind of inviting us to dream of a future where there were chairs on every corner, there were access teams on every corner, there was water and snacks on every corner. And it was just this, like, really

SK 48:20
exciting possibility dreaming moment. And I was like, okay, so this is, this is how I want to end because I want all the amazing people that are going to read this to manifest their own crip dreams and kinship networks. And it's kind of an invitation to everybody else to, to kind of write the next, the next version of this the next book, and the next.

SK 48:44
Yeah, thanks for that question.

LLPS 48:48
Okay, I'm trying to find the link for that, and I'm finding different things.

SK: But I can go ahead and mute if you want to read the next question.

LLPS: Is there a next question, let me see. Um, yes, there is.

LLPS 49:03
Okay, so there's two questions. One is, I'm disabled and I'm working with a spoony friend to try and organize a network of care pods in Seattle. Oh, hi! Inspired by care work. Thank you. We're both having been having a hard time finding other spoonies especially since a lot of us are basically hunkered down at home. Do you have any suggestions for how to spread the word? Um, yeah, I mean, I don't know. I know. I'm old but I'm still on Facebook. I see a lot of activity on Seattle Spoony Network or Seattle Spoony something… There's like a ton of people there all the time being like, I have to go to the hospital. I need drugs. I'm stressed out. I'm, you know, just like voicing access needs. So, um, I think that's one place I think like, I don't know, like I really think about using hashtags I think about also, I think also about like, even if it's just a couple of you, you know, that can be good because you start where you are and you don't overtax yourself. Because I know some people who are disabled who've been trying to set up care networks were honestly like, I know folks at Oakland were doing it but they were like, fuck.

LLPS 50:00
We got a million asks, and we're all disabled. And we actually felt really swamped. And like, oh my god, we're leaving people out to dry. But like hundreds of people wrote us, and we actually needed support to like be able to answer all the calls for support that we were given. Oh, thank you so much. I think that's it.

LLPS 50:17
Yeah. And so I think like, sometimes that can be like, let's start with a small group of people. And then maybe those people can then be like, Oh, I have one friend, I'll ask them if they want to be invited and things like that. I also really think like, it doesn't have to, I think it's really important for it to center disabled people. And, and one method of doing that kind of care web can be that everyone's disabled, but also, if you know, able-bodied and neurotypical people who want to help out and who can, like,

take direction, they're great, you know, like, like, feel free to like, have them reach out. I guess that's my short version of it. Um, yeah. And then.

LLPS 50:55
Shayda, I don’t know if you want to, it's just that there's two questions that are coming up. And we have two minutes left, but should I, can I just read these and we can read?

SK: Please.

LLPS: Okay. Yeah. Yes. Hi, Jess is saying, ‘You both are wonderful. I might be too emo ish for an artistic question. But I'll be buying crip kinship tomorrow. But can I ask how to re-listen to this conversation?’ Great. So is it going to be posted on YouTube? I think.

SK: I believe it's going to be posted on YouTube. And this along with all of the other amazing conversations are going to be posted on my website. Let me drop the link in here.

LLPS: Cool.

LLPS 51:33
And Comet thank you so much for posting those. There's… Comet just posted some links in the chat to an essay I actually wrote about how disabled mutual aid is different than abled mutual aid that was on Disability Visibility Project. Sweet. Um, so yeah. And then Alex Damaris Delano says, ‘curious about access to crip membership… mentorship, I was so lucky to feel that I could identify as disabled so easily thanks to the crip mentors in my life. And I'm so grateful to them. And at the same time, I feel very isolated. How can we support mentorship, or passing along of crypt knowledge and wisdom? Thank you so much for your talk.’ Thank you so much for asking those questions. Um Shayda, do you want to speak to that?

SK: Yes. So I'm pulling up the link right now. So one of the first places I would recommend going to is the National Disability Mentoring Coalition.

LLPS: Wow, cool.

SK: Yeah. Going to put that in the chat.

SK 52:34
One, because it puts you in context with a whole bunch of other folks from across the US. And they have a network tab. And so you can kind of connect with folks that way. But kind of going back to this idea that Leah, you were mentioning of starting where you are and growing outward.
Kind of reaching back to like the folks that you do know, and starting… ‘Is there one in Canada?’ Let me see.

SK 53:08
I don't know if there is, but if you go to the contact for that link, they may be able to connect you. Because I know there are a lot of different organizations and Disability Resource Centers in different Canadian universities that I've been in touch with lately.

LLPS: Yeah. And Shelly, I would just say, um, check, I don't know where you are in Canada. But um, I would Google Disability Justice Network of Ontario. Um, they're based in Hamilton. And it's Ontario. But I know that they are led by like, young, disabled people of color. And they're doing a lot. So they might have something and if not, they might know where something is. Yes, [something] Yes. I'm also thinking about DAWN, which is disabled, forgetting the acronym, it's a disabled women's network. And I know that there's some branches in Montreal and Vancouver that have been doing things and also, I feel like I interrupted you, I want to say like, it might be one of those things where Disability Justice is often what we invent. So I think that like starting a mentorship program can look a lot different ways and be a thing. You know, even if it's just like, hey, like, Let's do group mentorship with each other, you know, like, right, like, let's start having like a peer support network, we meet once a month and talk about how it's going. But Shayda, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

SK: No, just that I do something similar to that on Instagram, folks. And so like, Yeah, going, going digital, I think is really good for just spoons, capacity, and a way to stay connected.

LLPS 54:33
Yeah, absolutely. And, um, one thing, I don't know if she has something that's easy to find, but Kai Cheng Thom, K-A-I C-H-E-N-G T-H-O-M, who's a Chinese Canadian trans writer and organizer. She had some really interesting writing a while ago about mentorship and the complexities of it because she's she was writing about being a young trans Asian woman. And she was like, Yeah, I know.

LLPS 55:00
I was pushed into being a mentor to other people when I was 22. And I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know about like boundaries or having limits or like what was and wasn't appropriate. And I was just kind of feeling my way along. And so if she has stuff that's findable, I remember reading her writing stuff that really spoke to me. Because I think a lot of us are, you know, I mean, speaking to what I said about, you know, oh, we just have to make it. That's true. And also, sometimes we're in these small communities trying to build the plane as we fly it. And sometimes there can be a lot of, you know, pretty messy things that come up where there's a huge amount of need. And then we're like, Fuck, I don't have all the answers. What about when I fuck up? Like, where? Where are the limits? If I'm 23, and mentoring 21 year olds, can I ever date anyone in my community again? And yeah, that's, that's how that her name’s spelled. And, um, yeah, it probably was her web presence. So I don't have an article about that. But I think that's, that is something that's important for us to think about. As we continue to think about being disabled people who are both learning from each other, and also passing that knowledge on in terms of looking at just power dynamics and things like that and feeling our way through. Yeah and I threw in the chat, the Ki’tay Davidson fellowship, Ki’tay Davidson was an incredible black disabled trans organizer and creator in Los Angeles, who passed some years ago. And one of the last things that Stacy Park Milbern did before she passed along with a bunch of other people, Andrea Levant, and other people, was that when crip camp came out the film that was on Netflix last year, Andrea and Stacy were like, great, it's a great movie, it's pretty white, take some of this money, we're gonna create disabled BIPOC spaces. And they created, they really pushed to create this Ki’tay Davidson fellowship that ran for one year, that was linking emerging and

rising, disabled, mostly BIPOC organizers and artists with mentors. And I will say, as a mentor, um, you know, working, the program was great. Everyone who was involved was great. Adobe was a little weird. You know, it was just one of those interesting things about like, what happens when you take corporate money. But it was an interesting model for me of like, wow, I haven't experienced this before. Like, this is an organised disabled intergenerational mentorship program. And it might be worth kind of like looking at some of their online stuff as one example of a public program that was out there. Yeah.

SK: And I know you and I also put our online handles in the chat. So y'all reach out?

LLPS: Yeah.

SK: At least I'm gonna make myself available. I don't want to like, you know…

LLPS: No no, it's great. I think I still have an auto reply that says, Hi. I'll write you back. It might take a while. [Laughs] Yeah, um cool. I think we're coming to the end of our time together.

SK: We are.

SK: 57:55
Thank you all so much. Thank you, Leah.

LLPS: Thank you, Shayda. And thank you, Laurie, so much for your interpretation. And…

SK: Yes!

LLPS 58:02
To the person who's doing the captioning whose name I don't know. And Stesha. I think you're back from the library to say some things.

Stesha Brandon: I am thank you both so much. And thanks to Emily, our captioner and Laurie, our ASL interpreter. Thank you both for this amazing conversation. It was just such a privilege to be able to listen and learn and, um, and we will be recording the we are recording the program, and it will be captioned for accessibility and then posted on SPL's YouTube page. And then we'll also link to the transcript. Because there's all these amazing resources in the chat. And we'll, we'll make sure that those resources are included as well so that folks will be able to reference those after the event.

SB 58:50
I also wanted to let folks know that Elliott Bay books has copies of both shaders and Leah's books and you can find books at their website Elliott Bay book.com. I've also been posting the links direct links to both authors' work in the chat. And of course, you can find the books at the library as well. We have both authors' books at SPL as well. We're grateful to everybody who made tonight's program possible. Thank you to our program partners, Elliott Bay books and Sins Invalid. And to our sponsors, the Gary and Connie Kunis Foundation, *The Seattle Times* and The Seattle Public Library Foundation. And of course, thank you so much to all of you for joining us tonight asking great

questions and being here. Thank you and we will see you next time. Good night everybody.

LLPS: Thank you all, thank you all of you for attending and thank you Shayda, the this is so much fun.

SK: This was amazing. Can we take a quick selfie before we go?

LLPS: Yes. Everybody who attended who's like I want to start my own group. I am so excited for your future. 5 million guests you know Sins Invalid, the next generation Disability Justice art groups out there like this just makes my heart feel so full.

JO 1:00:02
Shayda Kafai is the author of *Crip Kinship: The Disability Justice and Art Activism of Sins Invalid.* This program was presented on January 13 2022. By the Seattle Public Library, and the Elliott Bay book company. To find the full event and other great Seattle area talks, go to our website kuw.org/speakers. While you're there, subscribe to our podcast and share your comments. Thank you for listening. Tune in again soon.

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