Ep 20 - Libraries and Disabilities with Jessica Schomberg - Transcript

AJ: Allison Jones

KN: Karen Ng

JS: Jessica Schomberg

BH: Special outro reader! Brenda Henderson

KN: Welcome to the Organizing Ideas Podcast. I'm Karen.

AJ: And I'm Allison and we are two new librarians and archivists and your hosts for this podcast.

KN: Together, we're taking a closer look at the relationships between organizing information and community organizing, how libraries and archives are never neutral, and what we mean when we say that knowledge is power. We are recording on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

AJ: Today our guest is Jessica Schomberg. Jessica is a Media Cataloger at Minnesota State University. They are a union member, cat lover, bookworm, Buddhist, and social justice advocate. Jessica has type 1 diabetes and a number of invisible disabilities, and has written extensively on disability-related topics and librarianship. In April 2020, Library Juice Press will be releasing Jessica's first book, in partnership with Wendy Highby, titled, "Beyond Accommodation: Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Disabled Library Workers." We're excited to talk to Jessica today about libraries and disabilities. Thank you for joining us!

JS: Thank you for the invitation, I'm very excited to be here.

<intro music>

[1:16]

KN: Is there anything you'd like to add to the introduction or anything you'd like listeners to know about you?

JS: I have a goal to visit every Canadian province and I've got I think two left at this point.

AJ: Oh wow!

JS: I don't know if listeners will care but it makes me excited to talk about it.

KN: That's more than me.

<laughter>

AJ: Which two provinces have you not yet been to?

JS: I haven't been to Saskatchewan or Manitoba. Oh, unless the airport counts I've also not been to Ontario now that I think about it.

<laughter>

KN: Have you been to the Northern territories?

JS: No, do those count as provinces or do those count as territories?

KN: Technically not, I think they're territories.

JS: I have looked at traveling there but it looks daunting and expensive <laughter> I've been to Labrador, I think that counts <laughter>

AJ: Yeah that's pretty remote.

JS: Yeah so it's very cold <laughter>

AJ: That's really cool. Can you tell us a bit about how you got into this field and area of interest and how did you decide to pursue the kind of work that you're doing?

JS: I got into libraries because I love books. I am a stereotype in that way. Partly because I am a generalist at heart, I want to know all sorts of things about all sorts of things so when I was in college as an undergrad I think I had about five different majors because everything looked cool and exciting but I really couldn't stick with anything. And then I learned with librarianship it doesn't matter what background you have. You can come from anywhere and I was like "yes, this is perfect for me". Also I like to control the universe and as a cataloguer I kind of get to control the bibliographic universe in a certain sense and that is in some ways very satisfying to me. I got into disability stuff, that one's a little more personal in some ways but a few years ago I realized that I was putting too much of myself into my job. And this was because of watching my non-disabled, non-spoonie peers being able to work 60 hours a week and still be active in the community and do this and that and the other thing. I tried and kind of failed, or that's how it felt at the time. And then I realized that the burnout that I was experiencing was making me really mad about a lot of things and I really didn't know what to do with that anger and I didn't know what to do with not being able to do what everyone else was doing. And then I found disability studies and that helped me understand why I was so mad. It helped me understand that I really just need to have expectations based on me, not based on other people. And that helped me be able to express my anger in a way that felt helpful instead of just destructive. I really try to incorporate that experience into my work-life in how I relate to my coworkers and how I relate to the people we work with as librarians to recognize if someone seems like they're struggling in that way, maybe they need somebody to reach out and say "you're not alone and it's not your fault" and we just need to consider some things. So that's how I became interested in libraries and disability stuff.

KN: Can you talk a little bit about how your work as a Media Cataloguer and as someone writing about libraries and disabilities overlap?

JS: The first, at least the first peer-reviewed article that I had about the intersection of media cataloguing and disability stuff was an article I co-wrote with my coworker, Jenny Turner for

In the Library with the Lead Pipe. I don't remember the title of the article offhand <laughter> but the subtitle involved Gestalt principles and plain language. As a cataloguer, standards and policies and training materials are all super important and they're really rigorous and thorough but some of it is written in a way that is I think unintentionally ostracizing. From my own experience I have brain fog not infrequently and for people who don't know what brain fog is that's when it's really hard to focus, it feels like you're walking through a fog cloud all the time so reading is a challenge because you have to struggle through that fog, listening is a challenge because you have to struggle through that fog. Even walking around can sometimes be a challenge. So the energy that I put forth in getting through that cloud often with documentation that was written in a really inaccessible way, I would spend all of my energy trying to decipher what they were trying to say and I wouldn't have energy leftover for the content. And as I mentioned earlier, knowing from disability studies that I'm not the only one in this experience, there are other people out there like me who may not have a union to protect them and are less likely to speak out about it. We decided to write about how we can make our documentation more useful for the people that we are serving, whether they are students or colleagues and so that really helped—that was the start of me incorporating a lot of the disability stuff into library work in a really incremental way, making incremental changes that can have really big impacts on people who are struggling at any given moment. Any tying this directly back to cataloguing, I was recently on the OLAC/CAPC taskforce to create best practices for cataloguing objects and that document just came out so I was able to use some of what I'd learned about learning best practices for accessible documentation and was able to incorporate that into that document. And Julie Moore, who was the chief editor for that document, was really receptive so we were able to add all the tags for images in a way that OLAC really hadn't done before and incorporate other of those ideas into the creating of the document, just to help people who—maybe not neurotypical, maybe not fully sighted, have all sorts of different disability experiences and make the document more useful to them.

[7:59]

AJ: Wow that's so cool, congratulations!

JS: Thank you

AJ: <laughter> Thanks for sharing about all that, cataloguing is a mysterious and magical world to me so it's really interesting to hear about all the stuff that goes on behind the scenes there.

JS: Yeah it's a lot of creating and following and arguing about rules.

<laughter>

KN: I was wondering if we could really quickly break down a few terms, like neurotypical, also the acronym OLAC, and maybe alt-text?

JS: Absolutely. Neurotypical is—well it's easier to say what is not neurotypical so I'm going to start there, going from what's in my brain. So someone who's not neurotypical, and the definitions for this can vary depending on what communities you're talking with and who

you're talking with. It came out of autism advocates I think, really are the ones who created the term to refer to people with autism, autism-spectrum disorder, however you want to refer to it, to describe how their brains don't function in the same way that non-autistic people's brains function. And that expanded to include people with other cognitive disorders or disabilities and again there's not 100% consistency on some of these terms. So if any of your listeners are listening and would use different terms, I apologize. This is just the terms that make sense to me at this moment. But it also expanded to include people with epilepsy, it might include people with dyslexia, other sorts of things that we might consider learning disabilities because of brain functioning. A really expansive vision of non-neurotypical would include people with mental illness, like mood disorders, PTSD, other things where the brain doesn't function in the quote unquote "optimal normal way". And that's very much in quotes. The language that we have used to describe these things is really normative and it's really hard to get away from that so I'm trying but I'm also trying to make sure this makes sense to people who don't have much background here so hope that is an okay explanation.

OLAC is the—well right now the OLAC acronym really just stands for OLAC. It used to stand for OnLine and Audiovisual Cataloguers so it's really people who catalogue media. I delight in cataloguing puppet body parts, otherwise known as anatomical models. It could include games, music, DVDs, video games, all sorts of different things and the Objects Taskforce was really focused on what used to be called realia. So rocks, board games, puppets again, body parts again. One of the examples used in the best practices document is Jamaican tree bark doilies so it can include a wide range of things for a wide range of often special collections. I think there was a third thing that you asked me to explain but I cannot remember what that is?

KN: You mentioned alt-text

JS: Alt-text

KN: And it's something that appears on our social media sometimes but if we could really quickly break that down.

JS: Yeah, so alt-text is—say you've got a photograph, maybe we've got a selfie of the people participating in this episode, and so to someone who may be low-vision or blind or to someone who may have a computer system that doesn't display images very easily, it just is the verbal written explanation of what it is that's in the image and why it matters that it's there.

KN: Thank you.

JS: Those are good questions.

<transition music>

[12:01]

AJ: Okay so we're gonna shift into asking about some of the different stuff you've worked on, resources you compile, things like that. And I wanted to start with—on your website, you have this really incredible bibliography of materials about libraries and disabilities and the

very first item on there is a presentation that you gave about a year ago, and it's titled Frameworks for Discussing, Researching, Experiencing, Living Disability and it was really helpful for me to read so thank you. <laughter> And in that presentation you give a history of different frameworks and emphasize the critical model as one that really resonates with you. You don't have to go into the whole background, we'll link to that and so on but would you mind giving a brief overview of what the critical model is and why you use it?

JS: Sure, I'd be happy to. I might have to go into a little background just to explain why that one resonated with me. That presentation was for Dr. Amelia Gibson's informatics class that I cannot remember the full name of because I don't remember that stuff well but Dr. Gibson is really active in disability research and is amazing. So if you're thinking about going to library school and you're interested in these topics, I'd check her work out too. But the critical model of disability, going back a little bit there's the medical model which is really what you would often encounter in a healthcare setting. For me, it's how I as an individual am broken and how it's medicine's job to fix me. But since my conditions are all chronic, they're not fixable, there is no fix. So the medical model is really emotionally isolating because it's me as an individual and my brokenness and there's an extra layer of brokenness to me in this model because I can't be fixed. So it is really looking at people with disabilities as "you're a deficit, you're broken, you're on your own", which as I mentioned I find really isolating and not very empowering. The social model was a reaction to that and that really sprang up from the disability community and that adds some nuance in the sense of distinguishing between specific impairments that I have like a busted pancreas and the barriers created by the social world like the United States' $300 vials of insulin. For a lot of disabled people they don't want to be fixed so this idea of a cure or fixing them is really insulting. And the social model is really great for celebrating people as they are. I'm disabled and I celebrate that part of myself along with the community of peers who help me celebrate in that way. So for me the critical model brings both of those ideas together. I do have a busted pancreas and that's not going to be fixed and I don't really want to celebrate it cuz it's annoying. And in a perfect world I would be happy to have a cure but in the meantime there are a lot of social barriers that we could work towards as a society if we wanted to. In particular, the thing that really attracts me to the critical models is that they pay attention to racial inequities very specifically. They specifically talk about how racism and ableism are intersecting sources of oppression and so along with sexism and immigration status and other forms of oppression, they're all intertwined, you can't look at them separately within this model. And one of my favourite examples that I will probably ask you to link in the transcript is Mia Mingus' chart about the Medical Industrial Complex and that looks at the really big picture analysis with a lot of interlocking systems that work to oppress people even if we say that we're trying to help people. So it really—if you've read, and I'm sure you have Fobazi Ettarh's Vocational Awe article, there's a really strong resonance between those two concepts. So it's a really activist model with a really holistic way of looking at how disablement works and it emphasizes how research and advocacy about disability should be led by disabled people. So scholars might be involved, researchers might be involved and they might not have disabilities but they really need to foreground the experiences and perspectives of disabled people in their research in a way that doesn't always happen in academia, as I'm sure everyone is aware. In really practical terms to ground this idea, so if you have money to redesign your library, hooray, congratulations, that's wonderful. If you're taking a critical

model as part of your design process, you would invite disabled people to participate in the designing plan. It'd be people with a variety of disabilities from a variety of racial, sexual orientations, all those different backgrounds and really try to make it a real mix of people who can participate in designing from the ground up instead of saying after your beautiful new library in Queens is built that you can't get to different floors and there's nothing you can do anymore. Bringing disabled people in from the ground up instead of trying to fight against their perceptions of being excluded after you've failed to meet their needs. Sorry, that was a little harsh but that one made me angry. <laughter>

AJ: No that's fantastic.

JS: Okay

[17:46]

AJ: Thanks for giving context because it does set up where that concept came from and then everything like that so thank you. And at the end of that presentation you also conclude with a list of current issues in disability informatics and I wanted to touch on them because they overlap a lot with questions we've talked about on the podcast like gender, sexuality, race, colonialism, which brings it back to the intersectionality that you were talking about. But some of these questions are like: Who gets to define terms? Who gets to apply labels? Who gets to develop hierarchies? Which you as a cataloguer are very well-positioned to grapple with. So can you share with us a bit about how those terms and labels and hierarchies related to disability and disabled people are currently being defined or questioned in information sciences?

JS: I would say this is still in the early stages. I mentioned Dr. Amelia Gibson is doing work on this and this is all coming from her. Violet Fox who works for OCLC and who works with Dewey, she's also been very thoughtfully engaged in trying to improve systems within the constraints of the system that she works in. From my perspective, I would really love to see the terminology and labelling that we develop and implement deliberately include a broad spectrum of disabled people as part of the design process again. But right now the cataloguing rules for how we create subject headings and how we create classification numbers are based on literary warrant, which means it's based on what's published often by large publishers, often catalogued with large institutions, which in practical terms often means that these terminologies encode and reproduce the perspectives of non-disabled cis male white people. That's just how publishing works. So at this point given the rules that we have to operate under, I can see people starting to make a little movement but I wouldn't say that we've quite reached the "nothing about us without us" mantra of disability advocates. So there's a long way to go and if people who are listening are excited about this, you have a whole world to explore and create since it doesn't really exist yet.

AJ: Thanks, call to action!

<laughter>

KN: In terms of classification and controlled vocabularies, is there anything in there related to disability studies?

JS: Yes, Melissa Adler and co-authors whose names I don't remember off the top of my head have really recently within the past couple of years done an examination of LCSH and how disability type subject headings fit in with there. I know from my own experience of walking around my own library, if I'm looking for stuff about disability and the perspective of people with disabilities, I can go into I think it's HV social weirdness area, like "you are in a non-normative social group so we will class all of your perspectives here" or in the medical group which again often takes a medical model approach to a lot of these things and doctors saying how I need to be better at being diabetic and that sort of thing that always makes me angry. So I'd say right now and this is true for a lot of marginalized groups as probably anyone who's walked around a library has observed, people in non-normative and non-dominant categories get shuffled off to the side in their own quote unquote "special" categories and that's I'd say true for disabilities perspective as well. But we're there so that's something.

<transition music>

[21:56]

KN: So maybe shifting to Letters to a Young Librarian, you wrote this article about five years ago for the blog Letters to a Young Librarian about some of your experiences within libraries with invisible disabilities and one of the things that you were talking about in the post was the idea that productivity is more important than people and we touched on that in our episode on precarity. This is very pervasive in neoliberal culture and in librarianship in general. I feel it a lot in grad school. Can you share some of the ways that you observe this and how you combat it?

JS: So I was able to look at these questions ahead of time and think about it and this was one where the first thing that came to my mind was the lean scheduling. So it's like you've got to staff a service desk and it's like a game of musical chairs where you don't quite have the same number of chairs as you do people and you don't offer a variety of chairs to the people that are there, so somebody's always missing out a little bit. So lean staffing means not scheduling any redundancies or backups in case someone is sick. So if someone gets sick they have to choose between coming to work as a walking plague monster or staying at home and making their coworkers angry. So the thing about lean staffing or lean scheduling that I find really frustrating when I'm talking about this sort of thing is that within our neoliberal worldviews which all of us have internalized to some extent because that's just the world that we live in, it's really hard to see that someone made the choice to go with a lean staffing model instead of a redundant staffing model. So the coworker coming to work as a walking plague monster or staying home, it wasn't their choice to get sick but it was someone's choice to staff the service desk in a particular way. And that person is also probably the person that decided what the library's budget is so it's not necessarily the person who was assigned the responsibility of creating the staffing schedule, maybe but probably not. So it's the person who decides what the library's budget is, who decides how many people the library can hire, who decides what kind of sick leaves and benefits are provided. At least in the United States, sick leave is often not provided especially in more precarious positions. So these are all choices and the choices that we're making in our staffing models don't demonstrate care. I'd say that that to me is one of the more pernicious

examples of productivity over people that is kind of invisible because of how we talk about work and how we talk scheduling. So it's all very—it's a lot of rhetorical choices that make a difference here. In terms of what I try to do, I don't have control over budgets in that way and I also fortunately don't have to schedule any service desks because it's one of the things about being a cataloguer that's nice because I don't have to worry about that part of things. But one thing that I do try to do is when we talk about maybe taking on an intern, how can we pay them? That's always my first question. If they're going to be here doing work for us how can we pay them because we shouldn't acculturate new professionals into the field with no expectation of pay. That's not a good model to help invite people into the field. So it's just little things like that. All of us have different levels of power and different levels of influence so I try to find what pivot points I can push at and push at those while still complaining about everything else.

KN: I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about what you can do in your position as a cataloguer because sometimes when we talk about change, I guess for me I think oh you'd have to be in a management or leadership position but not everyone is and not everyone I think really aspires to. But I think like you said we all do have—oh I can't remember who it was that we interviewed that said that we all have power and we're all capable, yeah we all have something

AJ: Symphony

KN: Sorry?

AJ: Symphony talked about that, really really eloquently.

KN: Symphony, yes.

JS: Within a cataloguing or tech services realm, it might involve—so we get an error report, something's messed up. Okay well I could investigate who made the mistake and yell at them or I could investigate how the mistake happened and work to create a better process or create better training models or just work on fixing the mistake and trying to not reproduce it. I mean that's—any worker in an organization can make the choice between blaming the person or trying to fix a problem. So that's just from the ground level that's one approach that everybody can engage in. It's also—if we're going back to the disability informatics thing again, I as a general cataloguer out in the universe can create subject heading proposals. I can submit them to the Library of Congress for consideration. You guys can too by the way if you ever want to do that, let me know or talk to Violet Fox or any number of other people who would be happy to walk you through that process. But if I as a cataloguer notice that there's a subject heading that doesn't exist, these people aren't represented in our catalogue in any sort of terminology or it exists but it's a little sketchy, I can submit proposals to make it better and to make people who don't currently exist in our controlled vocabulary represented so they can find themselves. I can try to make changes to controlled vocabulary that if people are trying to find themselves in our catalogues, they don't find themselves in a way that's belittling or demeaning. It's usually cataloguers who do this work but anyone can participate in that. There are avenues for submitting those proposals. And those are just little things that are treating people kindly, looking for little moments where you can make a

positive difference. And that's where I run out of ideas <laughter> I do better if I'm in a specific context to answer those kinds of questions.

KN: Thank you.

AJ: Yeah, one of the things you emphasized in the article that I feel like also flips that productivity is more important than people is you talk a lot about the importance of relationships. 'Cuz you mention people who had given you advice when you were a new graduate, the team that you work with, building systems of support, which all emphasize people more than productivity which is awesome. And in your book's description, there is this whole part about solidarity, collective strength, care. I'm really excited to read that when it comes out but can you talk to us a bit more about those ideas and how you experience them in a team or imagine them like an ideal scenario?

[29:02]

JS: Yeah, so I have two answers and I'll give you them both and we can choose which one to keep in, maybe we'll keep them both in. So relationships—it was really actually hard for me to learn to value relationships in the way that I currently do. Partly because of the neoliberal world that we swim in but partly because I was raised to be a stereotypical German-American which means very focused on order. We must have order, individualism, hard work, and those are the things that I was raised to think are the most important contributions that I could make. I'm also a hermit to the extent that—I'm a hermit basically. I'm super introverted so that in person relationship building is draining for me which is why I'm on social media all the time because that's how I really get my relationship building opportunities in a way that is more sustainable for my energy. But at a certain point I realized again a few years ago when I was talking about burnout that was this moment I realized that my individualistic mentality was causing me active harm. My body really forced me to slow down and when I had to slow down I looked around and I really had to critically examine myself, my relationship with myself and my relationship with others, and I didn't like what I saw. I wasn't the kind of person that I have always aspired to be. And so I took that slow-down moment to really critically examine myself and people who follow me on Twitter know that I critically examine things a lot so critically examining myself is just the same internally as it is externally, which can be a challenge as well in different ways. But I had to make a choice about the person that I want to be and the person that I want to be is a person that brings patience and kindness and strengthens the ties that bind us all together. And so when I talk about this relationship building, this interconnectedness, and I don't mean it in those bumper sticker aphorism kind of ways, I mean it in that visceral way where you see a friend or even a stranger get mistreated by society and you get angry and you can't be silent because harming them is harming you and you can really see that tie between yourselves. So I've been really giving myself space and grace and time to grow that person and in the process I've really benefited so much for people who have made space for me, who have kept me accountable to myself and to them. The people who have really helped lift me up out of that really negative burned out space that I was in and see the possibility of a better world that is better for me and also better for other people and my relationships for those people. The other answer that I have to give to this question is something that I actually mention in the book so little foreshadowing moment here. So I grew up diabetic and

I went to diabetic summer camp which was sponsored by the Lions Club or the Kiwanis, I don't remember but thank you whatever group you are for giving my family the money to send me to summer camp. At summer camp we were really expected to let the adults around us know if something was wrong. We were rewarded for that. If we felt weak or low, like our blood sugar was low or we just felt really thirsty or really dizzy or if we felt like anything in our body or something that was going on was wrong, the expectation was that we would tell somebody and that they would help us resolve the situation. They would give us time to rest, to maybe eat a juice box. There were a lot of graham crackers in my world at that point in time as well. So those sorts of little relationship building opportunities too where you give people space to say "I'm not comfortable, there's something wrong here, I need a little help". I really—I didn't realize it at the time but looking back I can recognize that's a good model for sharing and for team-building to be able to say "okay there's something wrong, you've expressed that, let's work together. I'm going to value you and your humanity and help make the situation better". I'd say both of those are really what informs my take on relationships and relationship building.

KN: That's really wonderful, thank you.

AJ: Yeah I love that. In the episode on precarity I don't remember how much we got into talking about unions there but I'm hopeful one day we'll have an episode about unions because a lot of what you're saying too about that solidarity and standing together with people, supporting one another, that kind of stuff. I think there's a lot of those threads that weave in and out together.

JS: Yeah, that would be awesome, I would very much look forward to listening to that episode.

<laughter>

<transition music>

[34:13]

KN: So you foreshadowed this a little bit but you have a book coming out in the spring. Congratulations!

JS: Thank you

KN: Can you tell us about how that project got started, the inspiration for it, what that process has been like?

JS: Sure, the book is in final proofing right now. I'm very excited to have it be done and out in the world. It got started because I got an email from Wendy Highby, my co-author, saying that she was interested in writing a book on the topic of library workers with disabilities and she'd gotten my name from Rory Litwin who is the owner/founder of Library Juice Press and he gave her my name and the name of another person who also had public writings about disability and libraries and suggested that we might be good co-authors. And when I saw what she was proposing I was just blown away by her ideas. She's a really beautiful writer with a really expansive and generous way of approaching the world so I was really, really

honoured to be considered to be a co-author with her. And I just immediately said yes absolutely, this would be a wonderful opportunity and a dream to write with her. So that was how it got started. It was all the brainchild of Wendy Highby.

AJ: Cool, thank you Wendy

<laughter>

AJ: If you're listening <laughter> I mean we could probably guess at the main topics but I'd love to have you give us a pitch. What are the main topics, who are you writing to? Who is listening to this right now that you're like go get this book or go get your library to order a copy? <laughter>

JS: Okay sure. So we talk about unions a lot so any union members who are interested in learning about how your union can welcome people with disabilities better, you should buy this book and read it to all your friends and family. But the primary audience for this book is library workers with disabilities. We want to make it welcoming to non-disabled library workers as well but we really wanted to as I mentioned with the critical model of disability, the emphasis and the highlighting is on the experiences and the perspectives of people with disabilities. And that's really the approach that we took in writing this book as well. One of the things about disability is that it affects so many people in so many different ways. There are so many people who don't realize that they can consider themselves having disabilities. They feel uncomfortable taking the label as if they would be taking something away from people but if you are protected in the United States by the Americans with Disabilities Act and that includes people with chronic illnesses, chronic pain conditions, sensory disabilities, motor disabilities, a wide range of things, you are affected by this. You probably have experienced ableist discrimination. You might have internalized ableism which again is really hard to—it's the world that we swim in so it's hard to get that out of your head. And I don't know what the equivalence is in Canada. I think each province has its own rules if I remember right so that reference might not work for all of your audience but to just help people know there are people with disabilities out there. You count, your stories matter. Wendy and I also—we're both white, we're both middle-class so we have a lot of similarities in our librarianship lives but we also have different diagnoses so we come from different perspectives in certain ways. And we also deliberately reached out to people who have different racial backgrounds, different genders, and different experiences of disability as well to incorporate their perspectives in the book through interviews. I'm not a salesperson, I'm bad at this, I'm trying. But mostly I think people who want to know more about how disability, how disabled library workers, and how work itself intersect and function I think would find this interesting. It's a lot about work and what work means and what it does. It's a lot about the cultural and social world that we live in. There's sections about accommodations, how to get them, how to try for other options when your request for accommodation is denied, how to build community, how to build solidarity. How to recognize the role that care plays in library work and I mean that both in the sense of it's important for us to care for each other but it's also important for us not to come at these topics from a saviour perspective because when we come at these topics from the perspective of someone who's trying to save someone else, it means we're not listening to them and it means we're not taking their own reality as

seriously as we're taking our own. So it's a lot of different stuff all together. Please ask follow-up questions because I lost my train of thought halfway through. <laughter>

AJ: Well it's interesting because I can't say I've read too many of these library books. <laughter> But I did read one recently and it's interesting the different angles people take because I read Trans Inclusion in Libraries [Actually called Supporting Trans People in Libraries!], Stephen Krueger edited it, and in some ways what they did in that book is similar. There's large parts of it that are written I think for trans library workers. There's interviews with different people, different experiences woven in. But in a lot of ways that one felt when reading it like an introduction to anybody wanted to learn anything about that topic, like just get very started. And yours sounds a little bit more in-depth for people, like for disabled library workers so a different angle. Can you tell us about how you chose to go for that angle specifically?

[40:28]

JS: Sure, I would say that it's because our audience, our primary audience—Wendy and I had decided pretty early that our primary audience was library workers with disabilities. We wanted to let them know that there are others like them out there, that we're here, that we value them. So we do include some explanations for people who don't have disabilities to allow them to engage. The entire first chapter is about different disability theories so that's where our primer is and that's where our theoretical base comes from and then each chapter builds on that in different ways. But I hope it's welcoming for people who are new to the topic. I think it would be very approachable for someone, anyone in a library. I think it be at least at a certain level easy to understand the basic concepts that we're coming from. And we also did a lot of research using management studies to do research on how people with disabilities are treated in the workplace in general to make it so potentially it would be broader than library workers but a lot of our practical examples of things are based in library settings. I would say it would be a challenging introduction for someone who hasn't engaged at all but we did try to make space for that. But we really—it's the people with disabilities who might feel alone, that's the person that we had in mind. Someone with a disability who doesn't feel like they can talk about it, who may just be in the early stages of accepting that about themselves, maybe they have an adult diagnosis that's fairly recent, and to help welcome them back into a sense of community that often people seem to feel like they've lost when they get those diagnoses. Because the medical model is rampant and it's isolating and it's hard to feel—my diagnosis I was really young so it's not the same for me but just as an observer it seems like getting a serious diagnosis as an adult is hard because it impacts your entire sense of self. It impacts all of your relationships, including your work relationships and you have to relearn who it is that you want to be and how you fit in. And Wendy herself had an adult diagnosis and so that's really immediate for her to feel, and I'm saying this from having read her writing and talking with her. I didn't ask her permission to share this so I hope she's okay with it. But something that she expressed in the book so I feel comfortable with this part, something she expressed in the book is that we have all these judgments about ourselves as workers and then we have a diagnosis and so our old judgments about ourselves and our new realities are not aligned well. You want to be kind to yourself so it's how do you be kind to yourself when the world tells you that you don't matter and you

shouldn't be there. 'Kay there we go, I've got my elevator speech. Thank you very much for helping me with that.

KN: That's amazing. I'm really looking forward to it. I feel like parts of that could definitely be interwoven into library school curriculums because I don't really remember reading anything about disability studies in our library core.

JS: Yeah, I will say the Library Juice anthology, Pushing the Margins, which is really focused on the experiences of women of colour in libraries. I was reading that while I was writing and we do cite some of the chapters from that. Annie and Rose just did a wonderful job of collecting things to incorporate into that book and it was really influential in how I approached this personally because that sense of isolation and the strength that comes from community, I think that's shared across groups from different marginalizations. There are things out there I'd say that are corollary that you can—even if your focus is on women of colour or transgender people, there's lessons that you'll learn from that that would be appropriate to rethinking how you treat people with disabilities as well. So I'm making a plug for other Library Juice Press books at the moment as well. <laughter>

KN: Library Juice sounds amazing. For assignments we've had to do annotated bibliographies and I keep seeing books from there.

JS: They do amazing work, yeah.

KN: I was also curious if you're open to talking about it, were there any parts of the writing process that were particularly challenging but also maybe was there anything that you found particularly enjoyable, something that you didn't know before while writing?

JS: I'd say there are a lot of things that I didn't know before. I'm trying to think of anything that was particularly relevant to this discussion right now. Oh here's one, okay, so one of the books I read to prepare for writing this book was Why Unions Matter by Michael Yates and one of the things I learned in that book is that as a union member working with my union I have the right to ask for demographic information about people who are employed here. So recently at work I've asked for the information about who at my institution has disabilities and what rank they have in the institution. And comparing that with the population in my area I was able to see that we have if my math is correct, 0.03% of professors on my campus have a disability whereas the same probable age group at least 10% of the surrounding population has a disability which is a big discrepancy. And so in the process of writing this book it gave me a lot of information that I can use improvements on my own campus and in the lives of people that I work with here, which for me is really exciting. As you may have noticed in my previous answers, I like to make things happen. <laughter> And so writing the book allowed me to write the book and also make things happen in a local way that I probably wouldn't have done otherwise. Some of the things that were really hard to write were about—I share some personal experiences in the book and it was cathartic to write them but at the same time also really upsetting to remember some of the things that I've experienced in the past. It was also really interesting to learn about how there's a lot of research out there already about how people with disabilities could be incorporated into workplaces in a positive, welcoming, supportive way and so many of the accommodations that people need are free. Free! Zero dollars, but they get denied because they would lead

all workers to expect that they have the right to ask for things from their employer. So if you say “sure you can telecommute in”, well everybody’s going to want to telecommute. So the response is always that’s, quote unquote, “not fair” but the reality is the employer doesn’t want to make that change and doesn’t want people to have that freedom and that sense of power so saying no to the person with disability reinforces to everyone else that you have no power here. And that was angryfying but also really illuminating. I guess I’d say probably one of the takeaways from the book that I want people to really—I hope everybody gets this, is that if you make the workplace safe and welcoming for people with disabilities, it lifts the boat for everybody. And there’s research to support that again that in workplaces where people with disabilities feel welcomed and valued and part of the group, everybody is happy. It’s across the board high-rankings and in places where people with disabilities don’t feel welcome and valued there tends to be other problems in that organization as well.

AJ: Thank you. Our last question about the book that we had written out, although I think you already said lots of things that you are hoping people will take away from it, was what are you hoping people will take from the book? <laughter> Is there anything you want to add on that though?

JS: I think I would add for people with disabilities who are listening, if you have ever felt that the treatment you received is unfair and it makes you angry, you have every right to that anger. It’s not your fault that the world doesn’t welcome you. It’s the fault of the world and the world needs to change, not you.

AJ: Thank you.

JS: That’s my version of being idealistic by the way. <laughter>

<transition music>

[50:00]

KN: In a similar vein, what is something that you wish more folks whether they are librarians, archivists, general community members, whether they have disabilities or not, knew about libraries, your work as a cataloguer, disabilities?

JS: Sorry I’ve got like six different answers all floating to the top of my head.

AJ: Bring ‘em on!

<laughter>

JS: I think the first one that comes to mind—Jessie Loyer wrote a chapter about relationship building in the instruction that she was doing with Indigenous students and so it was a chapter in another Library Juice Press book called The Theory and Politics of Critical Librarianship, I think. As you may have noticed I’m bad at remembering titles of things.

KN: We can link it in the transcript.

JS: Okay, thank you. But in that chapter which was just mind-blowing and mind-opening to me, and this was really based on her—oh I’m going to get it wrong so I’m not going to say

what nation she's part of because I would have to look it up to be sure, but in the cultural tradition she was raised in people have certain roles and certain relationships they're expected to play and maintain. And she brought that into her teaching to let her students know—really to help her students process and heal from whatever trauma they encountered from the resources that they were working with. I think she was working with Indigenous students doing history about Indigenous issues if I remember correctly. And intentionally making space and intentionally building relationships, making that part of her everyday work and how she approached her work was such a powerful idea for me. And I would say for anyone who is interested in these topics, look at the relationships that you have, look at the potential relationships that you can build, and really focus on that because that's going to be the thing that will get you through the hard times and that's the thing that's going to give you the strength and the power to overcome some things that maybe you are trying to change or maybe things are trying to change you and you don't want them to. So I would say, I'd bring it back to relationships and community and solidarity, and those are the ties that really keep us together and I really wish that library work stuff would talk about that more and I really wish that people who don't work in libraries would—I wish it was more clear to them the role that libraries play in building community through children's story hour, through institutional repositories, through collecting the cultural heritage of a specific community. There's so many amazing relationship and community potential out there and so many amazing relationship building and community building things are happening but we don't always talk about it in that way and I think it's a missed opportunity.

AJ: That's a great thought to leave people with I think. So thanks so much Jessica for taking the time to join us today. It was lovely to talk to you. <laughter>

KN: Thank you.

JS: It was really nice to have this conversation. Thank you very much.

AJ: And if folks want to reach you online, where can they find you, how can people get more?

JS: People can pretty much always find me on Twitter because I'm there a lot. My Twitter handle is @schomj

AJ: Awesome, and we'll put links as well to your blog where some of the resources we referenced are all on there. But yeah, thank you so much and we look forward to reading your book.

JS: Alright, thank you.

[53:58]

<outro music>

BH: We can be found on Twitter at OrganizingPod (that is organizing with a Z and not an S). Our email is organizingideaspod @ gmail . com and our website is organizingideaspod dot

wordpress dot com, where you can find links to things that we've mentioned as well as transcripts to the episodes. Bye!

Transcribed by Sam Fred.