

# REDEFINE / ABLE

CHALLENGING INACCESSIBILITY

*the*  
*peale*

SEE BALTIMORE IN A NEW LIGHT

*“Inclusion is the natural order of things. ...  
Diversity is kingpin. No one is better  
than or more than or less than. We all are.  
That perspective ... will open opportunities  
for everyone. It doesn't create burdens.  
It creates opportunity and creativity.”*

— MARGUERITE WOODS / RETIREE + ADVOCATE

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# Our generous supporters

This project was made possible in part by a grant from Maryland Humanities, through support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Maryland Historic Trust in the Maryland Department of Planning, and the Maryland Department of Labor. This project was also made possible in part by an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant and received financial support from the U.K. Research and Innovation's Arts and Humanities Research Council and the UMD Friedgen Family Design Fund.

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this document do not necessarily represent these funding organizations and entities.



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# REDEFINE / ABLE

## CHALLENGING INACCESSIBILITY

### **DO YOU HAVE A DISABILITY? DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO DOES?**

People with disabilities make up the largest minority population in the world. Anyone, no matter what age, race, gender, or other category of human diversity, can have or develop a disability.

**As we age, we will all develop one or more disabilities.**

# 20%

The approximate number of people in the United States with a disability. This number is expected to grow as our older population increases due to people living longer.

In the United States, nearly one in five has a disability, and yet too many aspects of our society, legal system, and infrastructure remain inaccessible. For example, multi-story historic buildings are allowed to operate even though the lack of an elevator prevents those with physical mobility limitations from accessing all levels. Audio does not always come with captions, which means people with hearing disabilities cannot know that information. Online photographs often omit a caption or include the most basic description, which prevents those with sight limitations from knowing an image's content.

**Those with disabilities are not excluded due to the way their bodies function but rather because of the ways these materials and spaces have been designed.**

Redefine/ABLE aims to inform audiences about disability issues, to share the challenges and success stories of those with disabilities, and to identify ways we can create more accessible, inclusive spaces.

**We hope you come away inspired to change the inaccessible.**

WE FOCUSED  
ON HOW DESIGN  
MIGHT FOSTER  
PARTICIPATION,  
EQUITY, AND  
MORE INCLUSION  
IN PHYSICAL,  
DIGITAL, AND  
SOCIAL SPACES.

# An exhibition redefined by a pandemic

BY DR. AUDRA BUCK-COLEMAN

The Redefine/ABLE: Challenging Inaccessibility project began with the goals of sharing the challenges, successes, and stories of Maryland’s disabled communities; interrogating the idea of “normal” within historical, cultural and ethical contexts; and creating a model for the ways exhibitions and other information delivery can be more accessible. During the 2019-2020 academic year, members of the 2020 University of Maryland, College Park (UMD) graphic design cohort conducted research and worked with disabled stakeholders to create an exhibition.

We intended this project to manifest as an exhibit in two different physical spaces—the Carroll Mansion in Baltimore and the Herman Maril Gallery on the UMD campus—and on an online space. It became an online social media exhibit only due to Covid-19. The pandemic altered our installation plans and heightened the pertinence of the project’s mission.

Generally graphic designers strive to create messages for a broad audience. However, too often this leads to thinking about and designing for majorities rather than minorities. “Ableism” is a term used to describe the discrimination against those with disabilities and is stimulated by society’s stereotypes and pejorative views of those who look or act differently. “Universal design” is an approach to creating systems, spaces and objects that meet the needs of all people. We focused on how design might foster participation, equity and more inclusion in physical, digital and social spaces. We wanted to thwart ableism through universal design.

Redefine/ABLE was to be distinctive in the ways and spaces it was to be installed. First, installing an exhibit in two physical spaces is not common practice. Museums typically exhibit content and artifacts that no other locations have; however, this exclusivity inhibits accessibility and inclusion. We deliberately duplicated content in multiple spaces to reach more visitors.



However, both physical spaces presented accessibility challenges. While the Peale's building was being renovated, the Carroll Mansion served as host for the organization's exhibitions and events, including Redefine/ABLE. Built in 1811, the four-story building does not have an elevator. Only the ground floor is accessible to those unable to navigate stairs. The Americans With Disabilities Act, passed more than 30 years ago in 1990, permits accessibility exemptions for historic structures such as this one.

The Maril Gallery, too, was inaccessible. Visitors must navigate three steps to get to the far side of the gallery. As with the Carroll Mansion, those who could not traverse steps were prohibited from a full discovery of the space. In addition, the doorway to a side room inside the Maril Gallery was not wide enough for someone using a wheelchair to pass through. However,

**BUILT IN 1811, THE FOUR-STORY CARROLL MANSION DOES NOT HAVE AN ELEVATOR. ONLY THE GROUND FLOOR IS ACCESSIBLE TO THOSE UNABLE TO NAVIGATE STAIRS. THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT, PASSED 30 YEARS AGO, PERMITS ACCESSIBILITY EXEMPTIONS FOR HISTORIC STRUCTURES SUCH AS THIS ONE.**

unlike the Carroll Mansion, we were able to make the Maril space accessible. Jerry Romanow, the Department of Art's building safety coordinator, designed and built a ramp and widened the side room doorway. Although ours won't be installed there, future Maril exhibits and events will be more fully accessible.

The students and stakeholders also strove to create a more inclusive exhibit by engaging different senses. For example, an interactive piece asked visitors to consider whether historic buildings should be allowed to remain historically accurate yet inaccessible. Visitors could record their agreement or disagreement by placing a marble in the "Yes" or "No" marble run. Before dropping into their respective containers, the marbles would roll their way down a winding "yes" or "no" path, a visual and auditory voting reward. A voice readout scale would announce the different weights of the vote result containers for those who could not see the difference.

We also had planned to install tactile pathways with strategically placed QR codes so that those using canes would be able to navigate the exhibit space and access the wall panels with their smart phone screen readers. If a visitor was unable to see the installed information, their smart phone could provide them the content.

Applying insights and feedback from their stakeholders, these students created insightful and compelling content. However, for me, one of their most

powerful and lionhearted decisions was to decline installing in part of the Carroll Mansion.

The Peale staff apportioned Carroll Mansion space on the ground and second floors for the Redefine/ABLE exhibition: one main room on the ground floor and three on the second floor. Although the second floor offered a significant amount of exhibition space, it was inaccessible. The students decided against using it. Their thinking was that if everyone couldn't visit a space, then it should not be activated with content. These empty second floor rooms would send a powerful message about being inclusive.

For this cohort, creating this exhibit was an unprecedented opportunity. They wanted to make the most of it, which included making the most of the allotted spaces. Passing up the opportunity to use more space wasn't an easy decision but it was the ethical and right one.

Further, when the Peale staff suggested another exhibit might now install in the unoccupied second floor, the students had to argue for not only why they should only use the ground floor but why others, who are also eager to have exhibition space, should be denied the inaccessible space. Fortunately, they were able to make a convincing case and the second floor was to remain devoid of exhibition content.

Although the exhibition is now only represented virtually, which does not offer our planned experiential and experimental physical aspects, we were pleased to have this content represented at least in some way through the website and other digital platforms. The Peale hosted related events and we posted content to the project website and social media channels.

We invite you to visit these spaces as well as listen to and share your stories about disability and inclusion. Your story can be about a personal experience with a disability, about an understanding you now have about ableism, experiences as a disability ally or actions you will now take to be more inclusive. We hope you come away with an enriched understanding of the ways we as a society can be more inclusive for those with disabilities.



Website: <https://redefine-able.thepealecenter.org/>



Facebook: @Redefine.ABLE



Instagram: @redefine.able\_exhibit



Second Life: <https://tinyurl.com/xk3zyrjh>



Tiktok: @redefine.able



Twitter: @redefineABLE

# THE MAKING OF REDEFINE/ABLE



Mollie Greenberg, above, helped kick off the project with presentations about disability, inclusion, and ableism. Below, Quint Gregory demonstrates some of the possibilities augmented reality could offer. The students gathered research and spoke with disabled stakeholders, including Ruth Lozner and Cheryl Fogle-Hatch, at bottom.





The students worked through the different challenges and opportunities of the physical spaces. Above, Cheryl and Robin Marquis sit in on a work session at the Carroll Mansion. Below right, Naliyah Kaya, Robin, Cheryl, and Nancy Proctor help us test a mirror selfie concept for the Carroll Mansion. Below left, students prepare to interview with Sabrina Epstein.



# INSTALLATION SITES

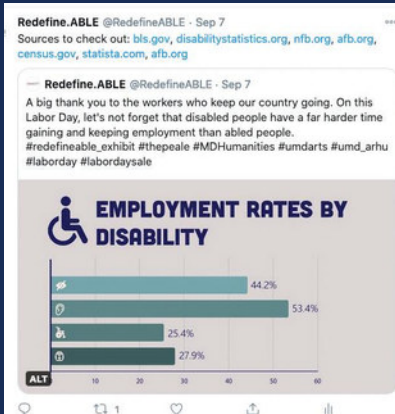


## Challenging Inaccessibility

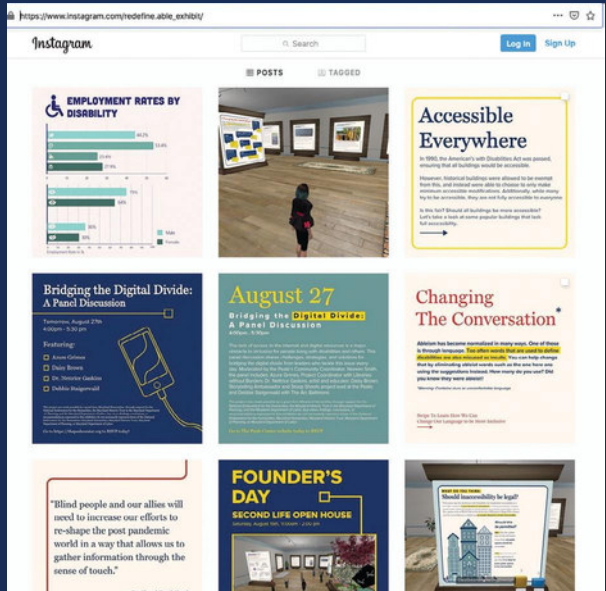
### How can we challenge inaccessibility?

Do you have a disability? Do you know someone who does? People with disabilities make up the largest minority population in the world. Anyone, no matter what age, race, gender or other categories of human

**WHAT ARE YOUR ABILITIES?**  
Take a moment to notice your surroundings. What information are you gaining through your senses? How do you move through space? How might your abilities be different from others?



We posted Redefine/ABLE content on a website, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Second Life. Videos were available on Vimeo.





**REDEFINE/ABLE**  
CHALLENGING INACCESSIBILITY

Join us on July 15th for the web-exhibit celebrating diversity and disability  
Let's Redefine "Able"

Posts About Friends 111 Photos Videos More Add Friend

**Do you know Redefine?**  
To see what they share with friends, send them a friend request.

**Intro**  
Followed by 24 people

**Photos** See All Photos

**Friends** 111 friends See All Friends

**Redefine Able** September 7

A big thank you to the workers who keep our country moving, especially during this pandemic. On this Labor Day, let's not forget that disabled people have a far harder time gaining and keeping employment than able-bodied people. #redefineable\_exhibit #theguide #MCHumanities #umdart #umc\_ajhu #laborday #laborday2020

Sources to check out: [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov), [www.disabilitystatistics.org](http://www.disabilitystatistics.org), [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org), [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org), [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com), [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)

**EMPLOYMENT RATES BY DISABILITY**

Category	Employment Rate in %
👤	44.2%
👤	53.4%
👤	25.4%
👤	27.9%
👤	75%
👤	68%
👤	36%
👤	30%

Male Female

**TikTok**

For You Trending videos picked for you

Following

redefine.able  
redefine.able  
Follow

Log in to follow creators, like videos and view comments.

3 Following 1 Followers 10 Likes

On July 15th, join the conversation at [redefine-able.thepeakcenter.org](https://redefine-able.thepeakcenter.org)

Login

Suggested accounts

- [gordonramsay...](#) Gordon Ramsay
- [willsmith](#) Will Smith
- [imkevinhart](#) Kevin Hart
- [selenagomez](#) Selena Gomez
- [snoopdogg](#) Snoop Dogg

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# PROGRAMMING EVENTS



On July 24, 2020, the Peale hosted “How is Covid-19 redefining exhibits and inclusion?” panel discussion.<sup>1</sup> Clockwise from top left are Jeffrey Kent, Baltimore-based Artist and Artistic Director for the Peale; Dr. Audra Buck-Coleman, Beth Ziebarth, Director of Access Smithsonian; Antonio, the ASL interpreter; Dr. Nancy Proctor; and Dr. Lara Perry.



On August 27, 2020, the Peale hosted “The Digital Divide” panel discussion.<sup>2</sup> Clockwise from top left are host Dr. Nancy Proctor; Jen, the ASL interpreter; Azure Grimes, Project Coordinator with Libraries without Borders; Dr. Nettrice Gaskins, artist and educator; Debbie Staigerwald with The Arc Baltimore; and Daisy Brown, Storytelling Ambassador and Stoop Shoots project lead at the Peale.



On July 29, 2020, Mandla “Kosi” Dunn hosted “Rethinking Ability: A Community Storytelling Workshop.”<sup>3</sup> Kosi led participants through poetic ways to take inventory of their own abilities and explore basic elements of storytelling with the goal of developing a short written, audio, or visual narrative around any insights gleaned from the discussion. Kosi is seen on left. Antonio, the ASL interpreter, is on the right.



On August 15, 2020, the Peale hosted a Panel Discussion: Accessibility and Inclusion in Physical and Virtual Spaces<sup>4</sup> in Second Life. Panelists were from left, Dr. Aundra Buck-Coleman; George Ciscle, founder and first director/curator of the Contemporary Museum; Alice Kreuger, founder of Virtual Ability, Inc.; Dr. Nancy Proctor, moderator; Monica Rhodes, Director of Resource Management, the National Park Foundation; and Dr. Jeremy Wells, Associate Professor in the Historic Preservation program in the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at UMD.



WE FOUND  
OURSELVES  
WONDERING  
WHY WE  
HADN'T BEEN  
DOING MORE  
ONLINE PRE-  
QUARANTINE.  
WHAT TOOK US  
SO LONG?

# Redefining Redefine/ABLE: From Access to Inclusion at the Peale

BY DR. NANCY PROCTOR

Pre-Covid-19, this essay began as a discussion of the way in which contemporary lives blur the boundaries between the “real” and the “virtual.” In our cross-platform world, my thesis went, we move between the physical and digital spheres like cyborgs: an encounter can be no less impactful, an emotion no less “real,” for having been experienced in an online environment. By the same token, there are few activities in the physical world that remain unmediated by digital tools, at minimum the ubiquitous “phone,” without which, it is easy to imagine, we would no longer have memories.

Ironically it took a global pandemic to reveal just how deeply rooted we still are in the physical world. By restricting us to online interactions for months on end, Covid-19 showed us how ill prepared we were to use our advanced digital technologies to their full potential, and where our digital blind spots lay. Even at the Peale, with a technologically-savvy team and a born-digital collection, we found ourselves in April 2020 wondering why we hadn’t been doing more online pre-quarantine, given the extraordinary increase in our global reach and audiences as we took all of our programs online for the duration of the pandemic. For example, the Peale now has a growing audience of Deaf participants in its online programs – an inclusive design development that was inspired the Redefine/ABLE exhibition’s move online and will continue into the Peale’s programming in the physical world as well. What took us so long?

As “the oldest new museum in Baltimore,” the Peale<sup>5</sup> has embraced its unparalleled opportunity to question and reinvent the very concept of museum for the 21st century, while building on two centuries of cultural,

technological, and educational innovation within its own historic walls. Opened in 1814 by artist Rembrandt Peale, Peale's Baltimore Museum and Gallery of the Fine Art Arts was housed in the first purpose-built museum in the United States. Rembrandt's museum was inspired by his father, Charles Willson Peale, who had opened the first American museum in Philadelphia in 1786. Rembrandt also introduced gas lighting to the city of Baltimore. By 1816 his Baltimore Gas Light Company was building the country's first gas streetlight network, giving Baltimore its nickname today: "Light City."

Peale sold his building to the city in 1829. It became Baltimore's first City Hall, and in 1878 the City located Male and Female Colored School No. 1 in the Peale Museum building – the first of the city's public schools to offer Black students a secondary school education. After the school moved onto bigger and newer premises, eventually to become Frederick Douglass High School, the building was used for manufacturing and finally became a museum again in 1930 – the city's first Municipal Museum. Part of the City Life Museums, the Peale Museum was known as the go-to place for those wanting to learn about Baltimore, from students to out-of-town visitors, and along with an impressive collection presented ground-breaking and critically-acclaimed exhibitions that focused on the social history and fabric of the city.

Unfortunately, the Peale Museum was shuttered in 1997, along with a number of other city-owned museums. Its collection was transferred to the Maryland Historical Society, and the vacant historic building was left to decay for 20 years.

In 2017, we began bringing the Peale back to life as a home for Baltimore stories, and a laboratory for museum practice. We are reimagining the 21st century museum as much more than a treasure house; it is a production house of culture—a laboratory in which we can experiment and share new models for accessibility, sustainability, and relevance to communities across Baltimore and around the world. The Peale is a place where local creators—storytellers, griots, performers, artists, architects, historians, students, educators, and other culture-keepers—can produce and share authentic narratives of the city, its places, and the diverse people who have made Baltimore what it is today to create a more inclusive cultural record of the city. In the Peale Museum building, Baltimore's stories and voices have a home that honors their contributions to the city's cultural heritage.

We recognized at the beginning of the pandemic lockdowns that without safe physical gathering places to record and share Baltimore's stories, the Peale risked becoming part of the problems it aims to address with its mission to create a truly representative soundtrack of the city. How could we include the voices and stories of those without access to the internet and digital story recording tools? We added a free "storytelling hotline" to our toolkit, making it possible for anyone to record and hear stories from

a telephone, smart or otherwise. Daisy Brown, the Peale's Storytelling Ambassador, started her "Stoop Shoots"<sup>6</sup> program, recording Covid-19 and other stories of residents around the city in safe outdoor locations to create audio-visual portraits. We partnered with Libraries without Borders<sup>7</sup> to include the Peale's app and information on how to share Baltimore stories in the "tech kits" the organization distributes for free to people who lack internet access across the city.

Redefine/ABLE extended this mission by specifically addressing the needs of and inviting those from the disability community to be a part of this cultural record. We originally planned for the exhibition to be accessible in two physical locations: at the Carroll Mansion in Downtown Baltimore, the Peale's temporary home while it was undergoing renovations, and at

WITHOUT SAFE PHYSICAL GATHERING PLACES TO RECORD AND SHARE BALTIMORE'S STORIES, THE PEALE RISKED BECOMING PART OF THE PROBLEMS IT AIMS TO ADDRESS WITH ITS MISSION TO CREATE A TRULY REPRESENTATIVE SOUNDTRACK OF THE CITY.

the University of Maryland's Herman Maril Gallery in College Park. In order to connect and extend audiences at these sites to online participants, the exhibition would also include a website and social media outreach to gather and share stories from people with differing abilities and accessibility preferences.

With the intervention of Covid-19, the exhibition website<sup>8</sup> became Redefine/ABLE's primary location, showcasing powerful video interviews of people living with disabilities and insightful essays on inclusive design. Anyone can share their stories of challenging inaccessibility by using the Peale's web-based story recording tools,<sup>9</sup> the free Be Here Stories app, and a free "storytelling hotline." Contributors' stories become part of the Peale's collectively-authored archive of Baltimore stories—now the largest in the world—that are published on a wide range of digital platforms as well as presented live in the historic Peale Museum building and beyond. All of the exhibition's events<sup>10</sup>— from a workshop on inclusive storytelling to panel discussions of how Covid-19 has impacted accessibility and bridging the "digital divide"—happened online with live-streamed CART transcription and ASL interpretation. The recordings of these events and their transcripts remain a free online resource, available to all.

In addition, we recreated the Peale in the virtual world, Second Life<sup>11</sup>, through a partnership with Linden Lab<sup>12</sup> and Virtual Ability, Inc.<sup>13</sup> Within the

virtual Peale we installed a re-imagined version of the physical Redefine/ABLE exhibition in a digital gallery modeled on the physical Peale’s “Picture Gallery,” the room that makes the historic museum building architecturally unique. The benefit of this additional exhibition version is that, like the Redefine/ABLE website and social media posts, it is accessible to online audiences 24/7 and engages an entirely new global audience for the Peale. The project has already received more “virtual visits” than people who would have been likely to see the physical exhibitions in person at the Peale in Baltimore.

Nonetheless, as a panel discussed during the exhibition’s open event in Second Life, there are limitations on accessibility even in the internet’s oldest and most developed virtual world: sign language interpretation is not yet possible due to the limitations of rendering for avatars, and some find the need to build and navigate the world via an avatar too onerous, either for their

DR. NETTRICE GASKINS ARGUED THAT WE CAN ONLY BE FULLY INCLUSIVE WHEN THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED BY THE SYSTEMS OF POWER AND OPPRESSION BUILD AND CONTROL THE PLATFORMS AND TOOLS NECESSARY TO CREATE A NEW CULTURAL DISCOURSE.

technical skills or their computers’ processing power. Even as virtual worlds have enabled access for people of many differing needs and abilities to a wide range of experiences and communities, they are not a panacea for inclusion. With no single platform or solution for universal accessibility, inclusion must be approached, as Debbie Staigerwald from The Arc Baltimore<sup>14</sup> commented during a Redefine/ABLE online event, “one person at a time.”

Distributed across multiple physical and digital platforms, the structure of the Redefine/ABLE exhibition reflects the emergent nature of the museum as distributed network in the internet age. Perhaps more now than even in its original dual-site format, the Redefine/ABLE exhibition represents an important initiative for testing and exploring ways of creating spaces that are not just more accessible but also more inclusive, whether physical, digital or social, in cultural organizations and beyond. The project has transformed the way we approach presenting online exhibitions and events at the Peale, helping us make important advances in the accessibility of our programming, as well as delivering on our mission to be a laboratory for developing more accessible and inclusive cultural spaces.

In a sense, the Peale has never been more accessible than since the pandemic began. The Redefine/ABLE exhibition exemplifies this pivot in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak as well as the Peale’s commitment to

inclusion. But is the Peale more inclusive as a result? As the Peale's focus on online programming since the pandemic started has demonstrated, there are limits to the reach and accommodations afforded by digital technologies. Like the historic Peale Museum building, currently under renovation to add accessible facilities and an elevator, the tools and techniques needed to bridge the "digital divide" today are incomplete, in development, and in some cases completely absent. How can we "dismantle the master's house"<sup>15</sup> using the digital tools currently at our disposal?

Speaking in a panel discussion on this topic<sup>16</sup> as part of the Redefine/ABLE exhibition project, Dr. Nettrice Gaskins<sup>17</sup>, digital artist and educator, argued that we can only be fully inclusive when those who have been excluded by the systems of power and oppression build and control the platforms and tools necessary to create a new cultural discourse. This is an important inflection on the 1980s rallying cry, "nothing about us without us," suggesting the need to redefine not only the Peale's commitment to accessibility, but also its strategy for inclusion. It requires the Peale and cultural organizations of all kinds to commit to capacity-building and enabling access to the means of cultural production for constituents. With these tools and resources Baltimore's storytellers can bridge the physical and the digital, connecting platforms and communities globally in their own distributed networks to write a soundtrack of the city that, by including all its voices, helps people everywhere see Baltimore in a new light.

# DISCOVER / ABLE

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DISABLED?

### HOW DO YOU DEFINE DISABILITY?

There are many ways people might be considered as having a disability. The designated handicapped parking space icon refers to one type of disability, but there are many types. **Many disabilities are invisible.** Individuals can be considered disabled or impaired due to cognitive, developmental, intellectual, mental, physical, or sensory limitations and physical or cultural contexts.

## Facts About Hearing Loss

### Causes include

- Infection
- Birth Defect
- Aging
- Excessive Noise

### Treatments include

- Inner ear surgery
- Hearing aids
- Cochlear implants

## HOW MANY HAVE DISABLING HEARING LOSS?

432,000,000

ADULTS WORLDWIDE  
CURRENTLY

34,000,000

CHILDREN WORLDWIDE  
CURRENTLY

900,000,000

TOTAL WORLDWIDE  
PREDICTED FOR 2050

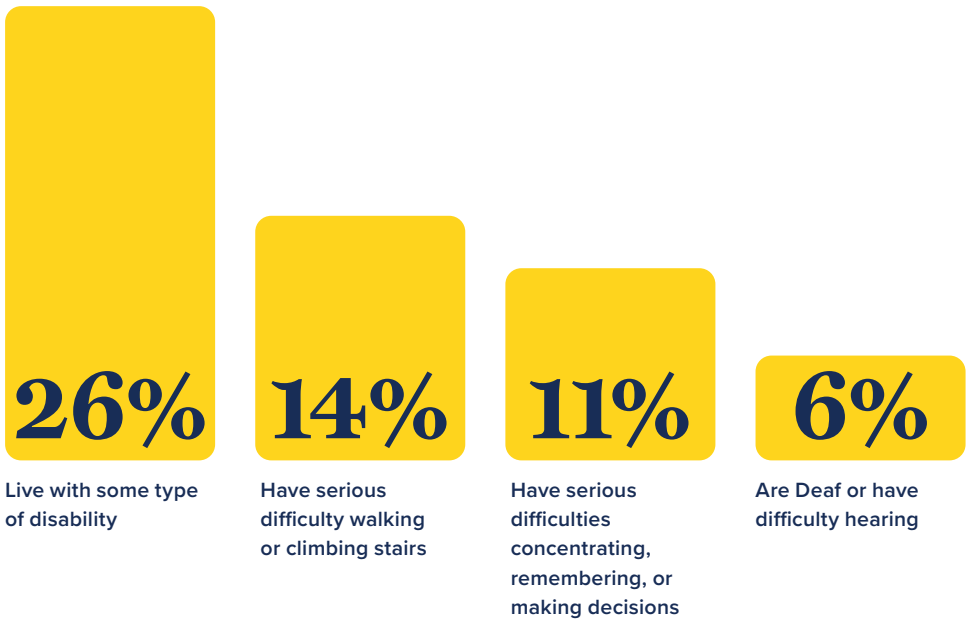
### COVID-19 + HEARING

Tinnitus is when individuals hear a buzzing or ringing sound in their ears. Researchers are looking into reports that Covid-19 has made this condition appear or worsen in some people infected with the virus. Others have experienced sudden hearing loss when infected.

## HOW COMMON ARE DISABILITIES?

Perhaps more than you think. The World Health Organization estimates that **15 out of every 100 people** in the world live with one or more disabilities. An estimated 2.2-billion people world-wide have vision impairment. In the United States, the estimated number of people who are blind is approximately 3.5-million. That number is expected to more than double to 8-million by 2050.

### PREVALENCE OF DISABILITIES IN ADULTS



#### VISION IN THE UNITED STATES

**26,900,000**

Number of adults who have experienced temporary or permanent vision loss

**80,000,000**

Number of people who have potentially blinding eye disease

#### COVID-19 + MENTAL HEALTH

**93%**

The increase of people requesting anxiety and depression screenings from January through September 2020 as compared to the same window last year



WHAT CAN YOU  
HEAR? TREES  
RUSTLING? A  
TEA KETTLE  
WHISTLING?  
FOOTSTEPS? I AM  
ABLE TO HEAR  
*NONE* OF THOSE  
... WITHOUT  
HEARING AIDS.

# Listen Very Carefully

BY RUTH LOZNER

*Every* human has differing abilities in both mind and body. How good is your hearing? Your vision? Your athletic ability? Or your ability to express feelings or ideas? We all possess a unique range of strengths and challenges. This is the wonderful diversity and commonality of humankind. While all of us must constantly adapt according to our changing set of abilities, there are some people who must navigate through their lives with profound challenges. One of my challenges is my hearing.

Take a minute to listen to everything around you while you read this essay. Listen. Very. Carefully. What are you able to hear? The trees rustling outdoors? The tea kettle whistling on the stove? The cat meowing? The television on somewhere in the house? Footsteps of someone walking in the room or someone speaking on the phone? Someone knocking at the front door? I am able to hear *none* of those sounds... without hearing aids. Yet, I am enormously fortunate that my hearing loss can be mitigated with technology. I operate between two worlds: one where I hear very little (without the aid of assistive devices) and one where I can hear quite a lot (with hearing aids).

Have you ever thought about how important sound is to you? How a song can evoke a certain emotion and transport you in wonderful ways; how soothing it is to hear the bubbling of a stream or the joyous peals of laughter. Sound provides a deep richness that is integral to daily life. Think about what living in silence might be like. Maybe you take your senses for granted. I do not.

My hearing loss developed over time. The changes were so subtle that I had unconsciously adjusted to an audibly compromised world. One day when I was about 30 years old, I crossed the street right in front of a moving car! Thankfully, the driver stopped inches away from me. The driver got out of his car and started shouting at me, "Didn't you see me? Didn't you hear my horn blaring? Didn't you hear my brakes screech to a halt?" "No, I suppose I was distracted and was looking the other way," I said, guiltily. I was shocked that I hadn't heard a thing! The realization that I had a quite significant hearing

loss was dramatically proven in that instant. How potentially dangerous, how frightening! What else had I not heard all these years? What had I missed or misunderstood in conversations? How upsetting!

A visit to an ENT doctor yielded a diagnosis of “otosclerosis”, a degenerative disease that renders the tiny middle ear bones immobile and unable to carry the requisite sound vibrations to the inner ear. I did indeed have a “severe hearing loss.” Over time the disease has continued its worsening conductive bilateral progress. For now, I am helped considerably by wearing hearing aids that amplify the sound loud enough to vibrate those rigid bones. The continuation of the disease exacerbated by the inevitable loss due to aging might push my hearing to total loss. I am comforted by the fact that the Cochlear Implant has been invented and will be continually perfected, and that I might always be able to hear external sounds.

What situations have you been in where hearing and understanding has been difficult: trying to hear a conversation in a noisy restaurant or rock concert? Attending a lecture and trying to hear the comments and questions from the large audience? Being in a classroom where someone is at the blackboard is talking with their back turned? Or maybe in a meeting where the participants are in a lively discussion speaking over one another? Even people with normal hearing have difficulty in situations such as those—now think how hard it is for people whose hearing is distorted, diminished or absent. Indeed, this is the beginning of empathy.

As we age, every one of us will find ourselves disabled in some way to some degree, whether it is temporarily, progressively or permanently. It is important to remember that there is a range of any disability from slight to extreme: from a sprained ankle to paraplegia; from near-sightedness to blindness; from a slight hearing deficiency to deafness. The great majority of the population will experience some degree of hearing loss in their lifetimes. While there is noticeable deterioration in hearing in most adults who are 60 years and older, younger adults also report hearing loss due to noise and high-volume exposure from the use of earbuds, music venues, or loud working conditions.

Hearing impairment can have a significant detrimental effect in the workplace, school, or home. An invisible disability, hearing loss often goes unrecognized as an impediment to communication and comprehension. When recognized, the necessary accommodations require assertive advocacy and persistence. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that addressed the widespread lack of access and blatant discrimination on the basis of abilities in the workplace and public space was immensely significant. In fact, the classroom in which I taught at UMD was retrofitted to meet ADA requirements. Like most classrooms in a 1970s building, the surfaces were all hard: cinderblock or plaster walls, concrete floors, ceilings without

## WHAT ARE YOUR ABILITIES?

Take a moment to notice your surroundings. What information are you gaining through your senses? How do you move through spaces? Consider how your answers might be different from others. It doesn't make one way better or worse, just a different experience.



What can you hear?  
Do you hear voices,  
an air conditioning  
hum, or an echo?  
Are the sounds  
muddled or clear?



How much can you see at once? Can you see a full range of colors? How does this impact your perceptions of what is around you?

What can you see?  
Do you have to  
move closer to see  
objects, text, or  
spaces clearly?



Do you have a choice about  
using the stairs or taking  
an elevator to get to a  
different floor of a  
building?



What can you  
smell? Can  
your nose  
detect different  
spaces? People?



Do you give much consideration to the distance you need to cover to get places? Can you easily navigate any transportation needed to get there? Do you have to plan your trip around others' schedules to get there?

baffles. This kind of environment produces the worst kind of acoustics. Even the slightest sounds reverberate making it nearly impossible to clearly hear individual voices. It was impossible for me to effectively teach in that space before the appropriate fixes were made of a baffled ceiling, sound-absorbing walls, and better lighting to be able to read lips and other visual cues. Now every student and instructor, no matter what degree of hearing they have, enjoy better communication in that room because of the improvements.

The advent of the Smartphone has greatly improved communication

for the hearing impaired. I am able to hear far better through a phone via Bluetooth technology coupled with my hearing aids. Texting, initially designed for the deaf community who could not utilize a solely auditory device, has become a ubiquitous and beloved form of communication for me and for almost everyone. We are fortunate to be living in a time of rapid technological advancements in assistive devices as well as innovative medical breakthroughs that address a myriad of conditions. When we consider design for all abilities we all benefit. The talented students who designed this exhibit proved that!

It may come as a surprise to you that I am grateful for my hearing loss. I get to experience the world in a particular way that gives me a unique perspective. Because my hearing is so diminished, my visual cortex must come into play in a more enhanced way. I have become much more attuned to a wider visual spectrum—facial expressions and nuances, and body language, as well as a heightened visual awareness of my surrounding environment.

IT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE TO YOU THAT I AM GRATEFUL FOR MY HEARING LOSS. I GET TO EXPERIENCE THE WORLD IN A PARTICULAR WAY THAT GIVES ME A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE.

I believe I have become a better graphic design teacher and artist because of those very sensitivities. Anyone with physical or cognitive challenges must develop problem-solving strategies to navigate and cope in a mainstream world. Those compensatory strategies take inventiveness and creativity—valuable skills to hone for an artist and a designer. My teaching often includes an emphasis on Universal Design (UD). It is a personal crusade to educate future designers in ways that are inclusive and empathetic, ways that will help make our world a better place. UD is a human-centered approach to the design of products and environments that increases the potential for a better quality of life for the widest range of individuals, regardless of age, size, culture, ability or disability. Simply put, it is a design process that aims to enable and empower the broad diversity found in all populations. I have become more empathetic and sensitive to the needs of people with differing abilities and more assertive as an advocate for creative, responsive and inclusive solutions to challenging issues and circumstances.

Let us all pledge to acknowledge and embrace our differences as well as our similarities, no matter what form they take. Those variations and differences are what makes us human. Let us not be complacent about mainstream practices but shift our cultural understanding of ability to build a more inclusive world. It will be a kinder, more compassionate, and more tolerant global community. We will all benefit.

# DENY/ABLE

## WHAT ISN'T ACCESSIBLE?

### TWO MODELS OF DISABILITY

There are two primary approaches that society takes when considering disability.

**The medical model** says an individual is disabled due to their body's limitations and functions. It uses medical diagnoses to identify these "faults" and says it is up to that person with the disability to "fix" their body so that they can become "normal." The person must change—if possible—or live with inaccessibility and exclusion.

**The social model** says that disability is caused by the way society is organized and designed. For example, a person is not disabled because they use a wheelchair and cannot access another floor of a building but rather because the building does not have an elevator for them to use. This places the responsibility for accessibility and inclusion on us, on society.

**Society has created disability, and thus society can create ability.**

*"I've got a lot of awards but not very many promotions and not very many jobs. They like to take a lot of pictures of me, but they don't really like to acknowledge that I can do the same things that they can."*

—JOE OLSON/FORMER ENGINEER

# DENY/ABLE

## WHAT ISN'T ACCESSIBLE?

### DOESN'T THE ADA COVER EVERYTHING?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in the United States 30 years ago. This legislation identifies accessibility standards for employment, telecommunication, public accommodations, public services, and physical spaces. However, **it does not go far enough.** For example, wheelchair users can run into many “legal” mobility obstacles including stairs, steep inclines, narrow passageways, hard-to-reach switches, and non-automatic doors. These are but a few of the many examples of how people with disabilities struggle to navigate the “able” world.

**When our society denies access to those with disabilities,** we make it harder for them to find a job, which in turn makes it more challenging for them to afford healthcare and an accessible place to live and thrive. Employers need to make workspaces and positions accessible.

*“Being aware of peoples’ access needs will only improve whatever community you’re a part of.”*

— SABRINA EPSTEIN / STUDENT

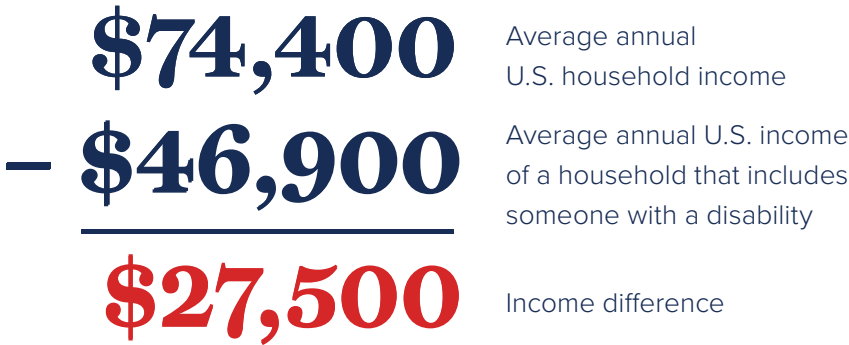
### COVID-19 + PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Covid-19 created both limited ridership to enable social distancing and a reduction of services and elimination of routes due to budget shortfalls. Due to this, people who rely on public transportation including those with disabilities had fewer options to get where they needed to go including to work, to grocery stores, and to seek medical care.

## WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

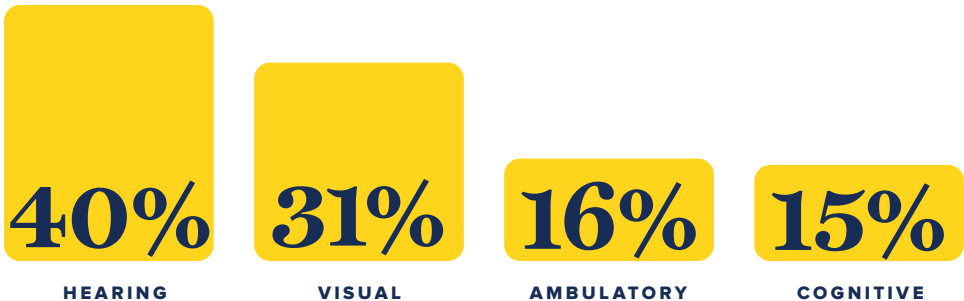
People with disabilities generally are employed at a lower rate and earn less when employed. The U.S. Census reports that approximately **28 percent of people with disabilities are living in poverty**, which is more than double the poverty percentage for the general population. The average U.S. annual household income is **\$27,500 less** for a household that includes someone with a disability versus one that does not.

## Annual income disparity



## EMPLOYMENT RATES FOR ADULTS BY DISABILITY

Having a disability can make it harder to find work. The percentages below represent **full-time employment rates** for adults with different disabilities according to a 2018 American Community Survey.





I ENCOURAGE  
SIGHTED PEOPLE  
TO CONFRONT  
HOW STIGMAS  
AGAINST  
TOUCH AFFECT  
THOSE TO  
WHOM TACTILE  
EXPLORATION IS  
ESSENTIAL.

# Please do touch the art!

BY DR. CHERYL FOGLE-HATCH

The Redefine/ABLE exhibition, designed to create an accessible, inclusive experience, allows visitors to confront their biases about disability, ability and ableism. Although it is now only accessible in digital format due to Covid-19, its original design for two different physical spaces offered visitors an opportunity to explore receiving input through different senses. In this spirit, I am writing to encourage sighted people to confront prohibitions against touch and to consider how such stigmas affect those to whom tactile exploration is essential for information gathering (i.e., people who are blind). This is timely given the development of new cultural norms discouraging touching in the post-Covid-19 era.

I begin this essay by sharing observations of visitor behavior at a tactile art exhibit, “Ways of Seeing,” that ran during the summer of 2019 in Baltimore. Next, I discuss the work of writers who have considered the place of touch in galleries and museums, both historically and in the present. Finally, I conclude with my thoughts on the necessity of rehabilitating the sense of touch to respectability despite the challenges to tactile exploration adopted in response to the coronavirus pandemic. When touch is expected, it will be destigmatized and people who are blind may hope to gain access to museum experiences in an integrated, inclusive setting.

## ENGAGING TOUCH AND OTHER SENSES

Ann Cunningham, an art teacher at the Colorado Center for the Blind, creates tactile art that is also visually appealing. She explains that tactile art<sup>18</sup> is “artwork that can be understood through touch. Even though it might look pretty good, too.” This multi-sensory approach to art informed the exhibition that inspired this essay.

The “Ways of Seeing” exhibition<sup>19</sup> was designed to be accessible to both blind and sighted audiences. Artists were invited to create new work

that could be “seen” through all of our five senses: touch, sight, hearing, taste, and smell. For example, art works displayed included tactile paintings made with acrylic on canvas, ceramic sculpture, wood carving, and various works comprised of mixed media. This enabled visitors to engage the art in an uncommon way: through touch.

I served on the organizing team for this innovative exhibition, and we hoped that everyone would touch the art, regardless of their visual acuity. However, this was not the case. On opening night, most visitors were sighted. I noticed striking differences in their approach to the art when compared to that of sighted children and blind adults. Some sighted adults asked our permission to touch the art. Visitors who were blind, along with sighted children, confidently touched the artwork.

The children enjoyed playing with elements of a free-standing mixed media installation at the center of the gallery. This work, “Exquisite Corpse”, by Cindy Cheng and Del Hardin Hoyle, is a “continuous collage of material textures” that is constructed with many different items including clothing hanging on a rod, two house plants, and an architectural model. The installation responded to the touch of visitors by producing different sound effects. For instance, the plants were wired to synthesizers that triggered on contact. A speaker below the architectural model amplified the sounds of fingers moving over it. Visitors could create louder sounds, audible throughout the gallery, by rolling marbles on the streets of the model or banging the artwork with tuning forks that were placed in slots drilled into the wooden top of the installation.



Photo by Christine Qabar

Dr. Cheryl Fogle-Hatch touching “White Ash Burl Bowl with Bark On” carved by George Wurtzel in 2019. The ability to touch exhibition objects makes them come to life for her in a very intuitive way.

We had promoted the tactile characteristics of the exhibition at local meetings of the National Federation of the Blind and on social media in the hopes that visitors would know that they could touch the art. I noticed two blind friends who moved purposefully around the gallery exploring the art with their hands and reading

the Braille labels posted next to each piece. Their careful and deliberate tactile exploration was a behavior repeated by blind people at other events.

Although I did not ask the blind visitors what they were perceiving, I can explain my own process of interacting with the art. When I first encounter an object, I make a series of rapid observations, classifying its characteristics in binary terms: hard or soft, warm or cold, heavy or light etc. Then, for artwork, I determine if the object is in two or three dimensions, for example, a flat painting or a 3-D sculpture. Then I explore the object more systematically, running my hand across it to find its edges and judge its size. I notice any changes in material or texture or shape. If my time and interest permit, I may ask a sighted friend about its color or other visual characteristics, and that information supplements my mental picture of the work.

Since I had proofread the artists statements prior to the exhibition opening, I knew the material composition and subject matter of each artwork before I touched it. Even so, each piece came to life for me in a very intuitive way. I could imagine the large tree from which a bowl was carved because I noticed the size of the bowl and I felt the alternating rough and smooth textured sections. I found that it was heavier than I had anticipated based on my reading of the description.

#### **DON'T TOUCH!**

Some sighted adults were hesitant, and they asked our permission to touch the objects. One said he had to remind himself that touching was okay. When I shared these observations with the organizing team, one member said that this shows “how ingrained not touching art is in our culture, and how difficult it is to change that even when art is created to be touched”.

Unfortunately, our observations about people refraining from touching art are not unique to the visitors to our exhibition. In fact, Cheng and Hardin Hoyle referenced this reluctance in their artist statement for Exquisite Corpse. “We take sight as a given and vision is the access point for the work’s substance. Work is looked at, appreciated from a distance, one’s hands in the pockets or clasped politely in front or behind the body.”

Furthermore, D’Eve and Kleege<sup>19</sup> document a similar reluctance to touch objects in a tactile art exhibit at the KADIST Art Foundation in San Francisco. They described how sighted visitors touched the art as “cursory”, “tentative”, and “imperceptible.”

#### **THE PERCEIVED CULTURAL PROHIBITION AGAINST TOUCHING OBJECTS**

Constance Classen<sup>20</sup> has shown that the prohibition against touching objects on display is a relatively recent phenomenon dating to the 19th century. During the 17th and 18th centuries, museum curators encouraged visitors

to handle objects because tours of collections were modelled on visits to European historic houses. Invited guests were encouraged to handle objects in these private collections, just as they were expected to eat and drink with their hosts. Most objects were not stored under glass; rather, they were placed in cabinet drawers from which they could be lifted out and examined.

When museums became public institutions, the ability to touch objects on display was restricted. This cultural shift reflected the views of 19th-century European middle and upper classes that associated touch with dirt, germs, and disease.<sup>21</sup> Since light was equated with sanitation, the sense of sight was superior and the sense of touch was labeled as primitive.

In this worldview, museums were viewed as having a “civilizing and educational effect on the general public,”<sup>22</sup> objects were to be viewed at a distance. The physical environment of the museum was altered to reflect these beliefs. Large exhibits were placed behind railings, and small objects were put into well-lit display cases.

#### **A RESTRICTED TACTILE ENVIRONMENT IS ABLEIST**

Deborah Kent, a children’s book author who is also blind, laments the lack of opportunities<sup>23</sup> for tactile exploration at modern museums. For her, “a visit to a museum is a series of encounters with velvet ropes, wooden barricades, ever-vigilant security guards, automatic alarm systems, and implacable sheets of glass.” These security measures, meant to protect objects, are simultaneously access barriers for people who are blind.

When everyone is forbidden to touch objects, special arrangements need to be made for tactile access. Usually, access is granted only at pre-determined times when selected museum staff or volunteers are available to offer touch tours allowing visitors “to explore different objects—either real or replicas—through touch.”<sup>24</sup> Results of a recent survey<sup>25</sup> indicate that some people value touch tours, but others do not seek out these experiences because they do not wish to plan their museum visits weeks in advance.

The traditional museum “touch tour” meets baseline accessibility requirements<sup>26</sup> with its controlled access that segregates visitors based on their visual acuity. Alternatively, an inclusive museum practice would incorporate touchable objects into all exhibits creating inclusive experiences for integrated groups of sighted and blind visitors.

#### **TOUCH IN THE TIME OF A PANDEMIC**

I wrote a draft of this essay before the coronavirus pandemic. Now, touching anything is considered a risky activity fraught with fears of contamination. For example, Drs. Sam Dooley and Tom Frieden<sup>27</sup> advocate: “Avoid touching commonly touched surfaces or objects with your bare hands, do not touch

your face without washing your hands first if they might be contaminated, and wash your hands every time you think you might have touched someone or something that might be contaminated.”

Even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is hedging their bets about the possibility of spreading Covid-19 by touching objects.<sup>28</sup> Their Frequently Asked Questions page states, “It may be possible that people can get Covid-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.”

It is not surprising that cultural norms emerging in the Covid-19 era preference information-gathering via the sense of sight instead of the sense of touch because visual examination of objects can occur at a physical distance while tactile exploration requires proximity.<sup>29</sup>

## THE NEED TO REDUCE DISEASE TRANSMISSION IS UNDERSTANDABLE, BUT SOME NEW PROCEDURES WILL DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT VISITORS WHO ARE BLIND.

The emerging norms against touching objects are expressed in all aspects of daily life, including museum visits. As of this writing, many museums remain closed,<sup>30</sup> and institutions that are open have restricted public access to hands-on exhibits.<sup>31</sup>

The need to reduce disease transmission is understandable, but some new procedures will disproportionately affect visitors who are blind. For instance, removing hands-on exhibits eliminates the opportunity for blind people to independently explore exhibits. In a touchless museum, our museum experiences would be filtered through the verbal descriptions of sighted companions or museum personnel.

I have had conversations with tactile artists about ways to adapt to new norms in the Covid-19 era. Collectively, we have come up with several solutions that might allow people to safely handle objects in an exhibit:

- Proper hand hygiene can be encouraged by providing hand sanitizer or wipes in a standard location within the physical exhibit space.
- Disposable gloves may be worn to protect people and objects.
- Materials that are easily cleaned can be chosen as touchable objects.
- Museum visitors could be provided with tactile handouts that they can touch and then take them when they leave the exhibit.

Implementing our proposed solutions, either singly or together, may reassure people about their safety when touching objects in museum exhibits. We are advocating<sup>32</sup> for these and other options that allow for tactile access.

In summary, the coronavirus adds a layer of complexity to the perceived cultural prohibition against touching objects. We understand that precautions are necessary to minimize the spread of disease, but we fear that new norms could be implemented in an ableist way. Blind people and our allies will need to increase our efforts to re-shape the post pandemic world in a way that allows us to gather information through the sense of touch. This work is important, not only to ensure tactile access for blind people, but also to safeguard the opportunity for everyone to benefit from multi-sensory experiences.

*“When you define yourself based on what you are good at, it’s difficult to have empathy for people that don’t have that same strength.”*

— JOE OLSON / FORMER ENGINEER

# ACCESS / ABLE

HOW ARE OBJECTS AND SPACES INCLUSIVE?

## WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN?

Automatic sliding doors for grocery stores. Audio cues when the lighted walk signals change at intersections. Closed captioning on videos. Voice-command devices that can change the temperature of your house. These are examples of universal design, a way of creating accessible and inclusive objects, systems, and spaces.

Some might think that universal design means making things more complicated, but the end result is often the opposite. It makes moving about the world possible and easier, no matter what age, size, or ability. **When done well, universal design usually goes unnoticed.**

## SMALL CHANGES CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

You might be living with universal design without knowing it. Do you have paddle-rocker switches such as the one pictured here? Or lever door handles? They are easier to use than toggle light switches or door knobs, especially for those with arthritis and mobility limitations, and they now come standard in many newer residences.

Some small choices can make big differences. For example, doors mounted on offset hinges can open up to 2-inches wider than doors with standard hinges. Sometimes an extra two inches can be the difference in making a doorway accessible for a wheelchair or walker.





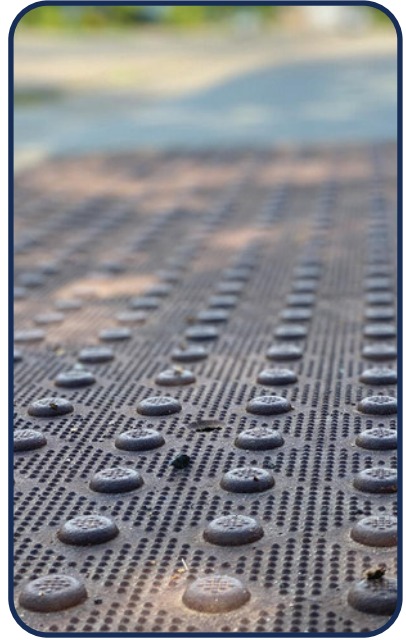
# ACCESS / ABLE

## HOW ARE OBJECTS AND SPACES INCLUSIVE?

### WHERE IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN?

Have you ever rolled a suitcase, a stroller, or other wheeled device across a long-distance? If so, chances are you used curb cuts to get from one section of a sidewalk to another. Curb cuts are slight slopes placed at intersections and other parts of sidewalks.

Curb cuts often have these bumps, which go by many names including truncated domes, detectable warnings, tactile paving, and detectable warning surfaces. The bumps allow visually impaired individuals to feel the edges of safe walking areas and indicate safe crossing zones while keeping the sidewalks and crossing accessible.



### HOW CAN TECHNOLOGY BE INCLUSIVE?

Chances are your keyboard has raised bumps on the F and J keys, which serve to orient your hands on the keyboard when touch typing (versus hunt-and-peck typing). This is essential for visually impaired keyboard users and helps sighted touch typists, too.

TV and other remotes also have something known as “Tactile Dots.” They help those with visual impairments orient their hands on the buttons to find the correct controls.





## IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN YOUR KITCHEN?

Food containers can be notoriously hard to open and close, no matter what level of motor control you might have. These pop-button containers by OXO make preserving food easier for all. OXO is one brand that emphasizes universal design in an effort to make household products more accessible.

*“Universal design is a level entrance. It is a place where everyone is using it at the same time. If it is done well, everybody is using it, the same way at the same time.”*

—JOE OLSON / FORMER ENGINEER

REPRESENTING  
PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES IN  
MORE SENSITIVE  
AND ETHICAL  
WAYS IS PART  
OF A WIDER  
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ADDRESSES  
INCLUSIVITY.

# Technology, Covid-19, and accessibility: Challenges and opportunities for museums

BY KEVIN BACON AND DR. LARA PERRY

The United Kingdom is richly provisioned with museums. According to its national Museums Association, there are 1800 accredited museums and probably around 2500 museums altogether<sup>33</sup> in the four geographically small, but densely populated countries that make up the U.K. Ranging from single rooms of local history managed by small voluntary associations to large national organizations with multiple sites such as the Victoria and Albert Museum or Tate, museums are a significant part of the cultural, educational, social and intellectual life of villages, towns and cities across the United Kingdom. As public services, museums of all sizes and aims are regulated by the U.K. Equality Act of 2010, which synthesized equalities legislation relating to a wide range of what are termed “protected characteristics” under one umbrella legislation. The Equality Act broadly adopts the social model of disability and enshrines the legal obligation to make “reasonable adjustments to remove barriers for disabled people” so that they may enjoy the services of museums and other public on the comparable terms as they are offered to the able bodied. The requirements of the U.K.’s Equality Act are less rigorous than the expectations outlined by Universal Design or its European equivalent, Design for All, but 10 years on from its passage into law the impact on museums and their diverse audiences is being increasingly felt.

Museums in the U.K. are in most cases supported primarily or partly by money distributed via the taxation system, and since the 1980s, the public funding agencies who are responsible for allocating resource have prioritized access, engagement and participation in cultural organizations in their awarding processes. Favoring attendance figures over collections



Students test out the former Maril Gallery ramp, which was used as a temporary solution to make the gallery's lower level of the gallery accessible. A permanent ramp is now in place.

care and development has in some cases been a significant priority shift for U.K. museums, but has also fostered a culture of museum working that has expanded the attention given to visitors in many different directions. Most museums of a significant size have an education department or provision which develops programming that relates to formal and informal education for children and adults. Many of these departments are of 20 or more years standing; more recently young adults (18-25) are the subject of many special provisions such as advantageous membership rates and development councils; and "late" events that combine museum visits with informal socializing are increasingly offered in national and regionally focussed institutions. Museums are making huge efforts to provide programmes and activities that attract and engage socially diverse audiences, including focussing on minoritized groups like Afro-Caribbean, Asian and LGBTQIA+ histories and culture. This shift in focus has been strongly encouraged by funding agencies: Arts Council England, for example, requires the museums it funds as part of its National Portfolio Organisation programme to demonstrate how they contribute to its Creative Case for Diversity<sup>34</sup> programme. In large part these measures are succeeding: in February 2020 Lara Perry paid a Saturday visit to Birmingham, England's second largest city, which is characterized by a relatively high degree

of racial diversity in its population, and found the city museum, its exceptional library, and its contemporary art centre teeming with visitors enjoying the facilities and engaging with the collections and programmes. Museums are a vibrant feature of contemporary civic life in the U.K.

Providing access and facilities for visitors with disabilities is part of this growth in what Peter Samis and Mimi Michaelson (2017) termed the “visitor centred-museum.” Some of the specific challenges in evolving this museum provision in the U.K. relate to issues of physical accessibility in sites that are historic buildings and may be far removed from accessible transport. The U.K. has a well-preserved architectural history that is an essential element of its heritage provision for residents and for tourists. The public (government) body Historic England is responsible for safeguarding the nation’s built environment and runs a programme of “listing” buildings that prevents those of special architectural interest from being significantly altered; all buildings built before 1700 and most built before 1850 are “listed” which means that very strict regulations are placed on their alteration, from structural and material integrity to matters which may seem minor such as paint colour. Whether formally “listed” or not, many U.K. organizations value historic buildings, and the historic fabric of a building is perceived to be part of the cultural experience of heritage and museums. A large number of the country’s museums were built in the nineteenth century, many before electricity became widely available – the “lift” or elevator which is so integral to most accessible buildings had not yet been imagined; nor had the society which would demand that institutions of scholarship and learning be made accessible to those with physical disabilities. Historic England’s guidance<sup>35</sup> on these matters suggests that, “If there are any conflicts between the interests of access and conservation, it may be possible to reconcile these through creative and sensitive design,” and offers numerous examples of sensitively and sensibly designed features that enhance accessibility of historic buildings by using well-planned signage, harmonized materials, and staff training to improve physical access. But the Equalities Act also allows that a reasonable adjustment may be one that allows a visitor to avoid an aspect of a building or site for which access is a challenge; in the U.K. context, universal design will not be retrofitted.

Accessibility of course extends far beyond the question of physical access, and more holistic approaches to accessibility are currently being developed in the sector. A recent project conducted in partnership between the Wellcome Collection—a free museum and library in London that concerns itself with thinking about health—and the University of Leicester Research Centre for Museums and Galleries drew on around twenty years of research on the representation of difference and disability in museums. The project culminated in a series of exhibition projects at the Wellcome

Collection<sup>36</sup> including a permanent display, “Being Human,” but also a code of practice for “An ethical approach to interpreting disability and difference.” This primarily concerns the representation of persons with disabilities and differences in museums that foster “empathy, respect, understanding and dignity.” Undertaking to represent people with disabilities in more sensitive and ethical ways is part of a wider strategy that addresses inclusivity of diverse audiences, partly through adaptations for sensory impairments like guided visits, access tours including audio tours, and enhanced visual access, including design that responds to the needs of neurodiverse users. One tactic some museums have adopted to meet the challenge of improving access is to set up and support access advisory groups. These groups, usually made up of non-museum professionals with a variety of disabilities, often start out as user testing groups. But if support for the group is maintained, the relationship between an advisory group and a museum can evolve so that they influence programming, collecting and even, arguably, becoming a component of the museum’s governance structure. Civic museums, which are well placed to develop longer term relationships with local communities, are particularly successful in running these advisory groups: long-standing examples<sup>37</sup> include

A MORE RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE U.K. MUSEUMS SECTOR AND ACCESSIBILITY IS THE DRIVE TO RECOGNIZE THE WAYS THAT MUSEUMS CAN PROMOTE “WELL-BEING,” WHICH IS A MEASURE OF GENERAL HEALTH THAT INCLUDES SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INCLUSION.

the Royal Pavilion & Museums in Brighton & Hove, the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, and the Horniman Museum in London, which has been running its advisory group since 2007 and is a well documented example.

Such initiatives are the result of ongoing work that is being undertaken in response to the Equalities Act and the social model of disability that underpins it. A more recent development in the U.K. museums sector and accessibility is the drive to recognize the ways that museums can promote “well-being,” which is a measure of general health that includes social and emotional inclusion. While not a matter of accessibility in the usual sense, it is certainly a matter of inclusivity and often focuses on the capacity of museums to support users with, specifically, social impairments relating to memory loss and with other conditions such as anxiety that are normally diagnosed in relation to mental health. This work is being led by the Culture, Health and Well-Being Alliance<sup>38</sup> which was formed in 2018 from a merger of a large number of organizations representing a range of museums, cultural

organizations and public health agencies. The aim of the alliance is to support the arts and museums for “expressive, restorative, educational and therapeutic processes” that support the delivery of the U.K.’s National Health Service. As the challenges of maintaining good mental health for individuals of all ages come to the fore this decade, the important role of museums’ contribution to maintaining socially healthy communities, including ones which are inclusive of wide ranges of difference and diversity, will continue to be important and dynamic considerations for museum practitioners.

Are these needs best met by existing museum practices or the use of new technologies? The increased use of digital technology by museums has presented new opportunities and challenges for access. Like other museums across the world, U.K. museums often use mobile technology to deliver accessible content to visitors, such as the Roald Dahl Museum’s award winning Signly App,<sup>39</sup> which provides British Sign Language commentary on key exhibits. Some museums have also used digital technology to facilitate an entirely new offer to those with disabilities, such as the National Museums Liverpool’s House of Memories app<sup>40</sup> which is designed to support those caring for people with dementia. The U.K. government has played a key role in promoting digital accessibility: in 2018 it published new guidelines<sup>41</sup> which all public sector museums are required to follow and are recommended by the National Lottery Heritage Fund for those applying for funding. The Jodi Awards, set up by the Museums Computer Group in 2002, has highlighted best practice for digital accessibility in museums for almost two decades.

The Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020, whose transformative effects are in place as we complete this text, has created both an opportunity, and a burden, on museums to work with audiences via digital platforms when most museum activities have been suspended in an effort to foster physical well-being in the midst of a public health crisis. The digital offer of museums—often perceived as a pathway to, or substitute for, engagement with the primary collections work of the museum—has suddenly been foregrounded. Major professional organizations such as the International Council of Museums and the American Association of Museums have created guidance for museums on the modes and objectives of digital engagement, and some really creative practice and startling successes have emerged from what might have been a period of total inactivity. It is wholly in keeping with our concerns and investigations that we take advantage of this digital moment in museums to engage in the online delivery of the Redefine/ABLE project. It is testimony to the resilience and ambition of museums that they continue to work with their communities in this context, and we are learning a great deal by working with the University of Maryland, College Park and the Peale to help develop and explore the impact of digital work on museum accessibility.



# CONFRONT / ABLE

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ABLEIST?

### HOW DO YOU RECOGNIZE ABLEISM?

When you type “Is ableism” into a Google search, the first three search completions are “a thing,” “illegal,” and “real.” The answer to all three is yes.

Ableism is a term that refers to prejudice or discrimination toward those with disabilities and a preference for fully able-bodied people. As with other “isms” including racism and sexism, **ableism is a system of oppression** that is based upon how we perceive ourselves as different from others.

An interactive augmented reality component, prepared for the physical exhibit opening, identified the inaccessible features of UMD’s Herman Maril Gallery including that the doors to a small inner-gallery room were not wide enough for a wheelchair to pass through, the space’s poor acoustics, which make it difficult to use audio-based descriptive devices, and the lack of a ramp unable to navigate the two steps to the lower level. As part of the project, we were able to address two of these accessibility issues. We widened the side door to be an ADA-compliant width and created a ramp connecting the upper level to the lower level.



## HAVE YOU EVER ...

Ask yourself if you have ever done or considered doing the following:

- **Grabbed** a blind person's arm to guide them without asking first
- **Pushed** someone's wheelchair without asking first
- **Assumed** that ability made some bodies better than others
- **Felt entitled** to inquire about a stranger's disability
- **Negatively judged** someone for using a handicapped parking space because they did not look like they had a disability
- **Gotten inspired** from watching someone with a disability perform a task that you took for granted

These are all ableist and rooted in misconceptions and ideas of superiority.

**Identifying them is the first step to eliminate ableism.**



RESPONSES  
DURING THE  
PANDEMIC  
HIGHLIGHTED  
AND MAGNIFIED  
THE PREJUDICE  
AGAINST  
THOSE WITH  
DISABILITIES.

# The interconnectedness of Covid-19 to discrimination against the disabled

BY DRS. AUDRA BUCK-COLEMAN  
AND CHERYL FOGLE-HATCH

*This article was first published in July 2020 on the Redefine/ABLE website.*

Emergencies tend to make vulnerable populations more so. Those with scarce resources are less able to afford protections, precautions and safeguards. The current pandemic is no exception. Covid-19 has amplified and compounded inequity and oppression for many including those with disabilities. The mission of Redefine/ABLE has become more urgent given the magnitude of the pandemic as well as the fact that approximately 20 percent<sup>42</sup> of the U.S. population has a disability.

“Ableism” is a term used to describe the discrimination against those with disabilities. As with the other “isms” including as racism, sexism, and ageism, ableism is a long-standing form of discrimination that stems from pejorative ideas about others’ identities. Universal design<sup>43</sup> is an approach to creating systems, spaces and objects that meet the needs of all people. People with disabilities have been negatively impacted by Covid-19 due to discriminatory responses and lack of universal design—both before and during the pandemic.

Responses during the pandemic highlighted and magnified the prejudice against those with disabilities. Some intentionally devalued people with disabilities. Others simply didn’t include them. Here are some examples:

- In March 2020, when schools closed their physical building and transitioned their curriculum to online learning, then-Education

Secretary Betsy DeVos considered suspending the accommodations<sup>44</sup> required by the Disabilities Education Act. Although numerous organizations including the National Urban League<sup>45</sup> and The Education Trust<sup>46</sup> argued against these measures, others including The School Superintendents Association,<sup>47</sup> disagreed. Their argument was that since educators were struggling to provide curriculum to mainstream students, they should not have to limit those efforts to educate those with disabilities. Ultimately DeVos decided against<sup>48</sup> such waivers, but the mere possibility gave credence to the ableist idea that students with disabilities are less worthy of the fundamental right of an education.

IN THE UNITED STATES, MORE THAN 25% OF THE PEOPLE LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE ARE DISABLED. LOSING MEDICAL COVERAGE WOULD PUT THEM AT AN EVEN GREATER DISADVANTAGE.

- Similarly, others expressed<sup>49</sup> that the economy should take priority over those who were “unproductive” to society. The sacrifices people across the world were being asked to make were not warranted to ensure the livelihood of the elderly and disabled. Similar arguments were that we should let “herd immunity” run its course, eliminating those who aren’t the fittest and strongest, those who are not disabled.
- Along with this came proposed limitations for health care for the sick. Hospitals across the country<sup>50</sup> including one in Washington state<sup>51</sup> considered rationing care to those with compromised immunity and other disabilities. Despite the fact that healthcare workers have taken an oath to treat all patients, the sentiment was put forth that the health of the more abled is more important than the health of the disabled. Adding to this is that on average, people with disabilities do not produce nor earn as much<sup>52</sup> as those without, and thus their human value is falsely deemed less valuable. These ideas have been given so much credence that others had to contradict them.<sup>53</sup>
- Some countries including Chile proposed creating a special status<sup>54</sup> for people with coronavirus antibodies, enabling those with a lower risk for the virus to have fewer quarantine restrictions. While the notion would create more freedom for some, it would also create legal restrictions for those without the antibodies, creating another form of disability.
- A March 2020 coronavirus-related stimulus bill, led by Senate Majority

Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), included a provision to deny funding to nonprofits that receive Medicare.<sup>55</sup> This would have kept people with disabilities from receiving their full benefits. In the United States, more than 25% of the people living below the poverty line are disabled.<sup>56</sup> Losing medical coverage would put them at an even greater disadvantage. These efforts are deliberately leaving some of our most vulnerable populations<sup>57</sup> without the support they so desperately need.

- An April 2020 survey<sup>58</sup> found that 48 out of 50 state-launched coronavirus websites were difficult or unusable to those with low or no vision. This lack of universal design meant that those with visual disabilities were unable to access up-to-date Covid-19 statistics, helpline numbers and best practice infographics and other visuals about how to prevent contracting the virus. Some were also unable to complete virus-related benefit applications or find testing sites. The inaccessibility of the websites of the government and others was well documented before the pandemic and it is even more critical now.
- Due to limited on-site academic testing during the pandemic, the College Board instituted only a digital-format for the advanced placement (AP) exams. The test is required for students to receive college credit or advanced placement standing for high school coursework. Successful test-takers can save money on college tuition, but the digital format was inaccessible for those with vision disabilities. It was not until five high school students and the National Federation of the Blind<sup>59</sup> filed civil rights complaints that the College Board reversed their refusal to provide accessibility accommodations including hard-copy Braille tests or tactile graphics for the test.
- The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people wear face coverings<sup>60</sup> in public spaces to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Although these masks create a protective barrier from the disease, they also create an impediment for those with disabilities.<sup>61</sup> The lack of universal design for transparent-yet-protective masks makes it difficult if not impossible for the Deaf and hard of hearing to read lips and facial expressions.<sup>62</sup> Further, the behind-the-ear straps on the masks and face shields cause difficulties for people using hearing aids. Additionally some people with autism cannot tolerate the masks (and other things) touching their face.<sup>63</sup>
- One of the most pressing questions for K-12 and higher education administrators is if and how to return to in-person learning this fall. In May 2020 more than half<sup>64</sup> of the nation's university presidents said they were choosing to reopen their campuses for the fall term.

University of Notre Dame President Father John I. Jenkins<sup>65</sup> called it a “moral question,” and said his campus would be open as did Purdue University President Mitch Daniels.<sup>66</sup> Daniels described not opening in the fall as an “unacceptable breach of duty” and cited the high survival rate of the stereotypical college age student. His statement failed to recognize that even those 15-24 years old can have higher risk factors for Covid-19 according to the CDC, let alone faculty, staff and other campus workers. These college presidents assume their populations are all abled and healthy. Further, Jenkins’ ableist attitudes ring clear: This leader of a pro-life institution finds the “lethal risks” of reopening his campus to be worth it “for the good of society.” College presidents such as these ignore the fact that college-age students as well as other members of their campus communities can have disabilities that make them more susceptible to Covid-19 and that their lives are still valuable.

The needs of the disabled were not prioritized enough before the novel coronavirus unleashed, and the instances above show how too often they are even less of a priority now. And although this list is not exhaustive, it demonstrates how far we have to go in terms of perpetuating respectful, non-discriminatory values and cultural norms regarding those with disabilities.

Further, we would be remiss if we failed to acknowledge how the coronavirus has amplified and compounded the inequality and oppression for other minority groups as well, including Asians and Asian Americans, Blacks, Latinos, immigrants and low-income populations. The needs and rights of these populations are just as critical but will have to be addressed elsewhere.

Finally, those with minority identities and their challenges are not mutually exclusive, of course, and the intersectionality of discrimination and oppression against these populations is a social disease our society must battle in addition to the biological one getting so much attention today.

*Note: Thanks to Robin Marquis for their feedback on an earlier draft of this essay.*

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

# Should inaccessibility be legal?

Thirty years ago the Americans with Disabilities Act established accessibility as a civil right. However, it also allowed for exemptions if making accessibility changes would create a financial burden or would impede upon historic preservation. As a result, spaces such as Morrill Hall on the University of Maryland, College Park campus and the Carroll Mansion in Baltimore **are legally allowed to remain inaccessible.**

**Should this be permitted?** We posed this question to visitors in our Second Life exhibition space. Their response rates are below.



# 80%

### VOTED NO

That this should not be permitted and that all public spaces should be accessible.

# 20%

### VOTED YES

that it was okay for some public spaces to be inaccessible.



THE PANDEMIC  
HAS IMPERILED  
SO MANY, BUT  
THE CONCERNS  
OF AND FOR  
THE DISABILITY  
COMMUNITY  
HAVE BEEN  
LARGELY UNDER-  
RECOGNIZED.

# Bearing witness to the ableism embedded within the pandemic

BY DR. AUDRA BUCK-COLEMAN, DR. CHERYL FOGLE-HATCH, AND ROBIN MARQUIS

The following is an asynchronous conversation between the authors. It was originally co-published in July 2020 on the Redefine/ABLE project website and as part of the UMD The Baha'i World Chair for World Peace's blog series on the pandemic.<sup>67</sup>

**ABC: The pandemic has imperiled so many, but the concerns of and for the disability community have been largely underrecognized. In an effort to address this, let's start with when the Covid-19 restrictions began in March 2020. What were your concerns in those first days?**

**CFH:** First, I had the normal worries that everyone expressed about disease transmission, their health, and all of the statistics about new cases, hospitalizations, deaths, etc. Then, I had concerns about the systems being set up that required sight to use, which was an issue for me because I happened to be blind. For example, the only way to get tested was via drive-through Covid-19 testing sites and banks were only serving drive-through customers. If you were unable to drive as I am, then you were locked out of these services. Banks have now expanded their services to accommodate non-drivers, but too many others have not.<sup>68</sup> My wife, who is also blind, and I had discussions about being shut out by these new ableist norms.

**RM:** One of my concerns was how I needed to change my behaviors in terms of social distancing. What pushed me to take it seriously was my being part of the disability community, specifically those with chronic illness. We have a different understanding of interconnectedness and shared responsibility. Even though I don't have a chronic illness, I know many people

who do, and I heard from them how important it was to take quarantining seriously. Personally, I had the privilege to work from home, and so I quickly changed my working habits and advocated that my workplace do that as well.

Something else that concerned me was that it felt like huge portions of society were moving into the chronic illness space. Suddenly people were paying attention to and needing things that disabled folks relied on all of the time for survival—literally for survival— including grocery delivery,<sup>69</sup> cleaning products and supposed “Covid-curing” medicines<sup>70</sup> that others relied upon for other health reasons. People snatched up and hoarded these goods and services,<sup>71</sup> and that had a huge negative impact on disabled people in ways that went largely unacknowledged.

Unfortunately, the broader society is more individualistic and seems to care only about and react to the pandemic in ways that directly impact them. This has been the case from the beginning. Too many people are not socially distancing or using masks or altering their movement to keep themselves and others safe. They are saying, “Oh, well, I probably won’t get it” or “It won’t affect me that badly.” It shows how little people value the lives of seniors and those with disabilities, not to mention the lives of care workers and other essential workers.

**ABC: Ableism, the discrimination against those with disabilities, has existed for centuries, however the pandemic seems to have exacerbated these oppressive attitudes. As part of this project, we’ve written about some of these instances,<sup>72</sup> and you’ve both mentioned some above. Are there other examples of ableism you would want to call attention to, perhaps instances that you are personally familiar with or that those less familiar with disability issues might not be as aware?**

**CFH:** That’s a difficult question because there are so many instances. Responses to the pandemic focus on avoiding touching people and objects while social distancing, maintaining at least a separation of six feet from others. For someone who is blind, this requires a lot of concentration, and it can be difficult. Now that businesses and other public spaces have re-opened, this becomes even more of a concern. This essay<sup>73</sup> by Nicholas Giudice details how stigmas about touch negatively affect one blind person, and I am glad that he published this.

I rely on my sense of hearing to determine the physical distance between myself and others, however this only works if I can hear someone walking or talking. If people are silent, I will not find them unless I tap their shoes with my white cane or bump them with my arm or shoulder as I pass them on the sidewalk. Either way, I will violate their “corona bubble” by entering their socially distanced mandated six feet of personal space.

Now, people will have to talk to me before I get too close to them. Before the pandemic I noticed that people had varying levels of comfort with giving me verbal directions. Adding the stresses of a health emergency will make bridging this communication gap even more challenging.

I also worry about how easy it is for society to devalue people with disabilities, especially when it comes to health care rationing.<sup>74</sup> During the pandemic there have been numerous news articles about how hospitals were considering whether to fully support coronavirus patients who were elderly or who have compromised health conditions. I try not to think of the scary possibility that if my wife or I get Covid-19, we could be denied care<sup>75</sup> on the basis of our blindness, especially if there is a surge of patients and a limited supply of ICU beds, ventilators, or other necessary medical equipment.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE BROADER SOCIETY IS MORE INDIVIDUALISTIC AND SEEMS TO CARE ONLY ABOUT AND REACT TO THE PANDEMIC IN WAYS THAT DIRECTLY IMPACT THEM.

More everyday concerns center on the large number of inaccessible websites that don't work for a blind person using a screen reader, software that provides voice output when text is displayed on a computer, tablet or smartphone. There are so many concerns that a website<sup>76</sup> was set up to document the ways websites fail to meet the needs of the blind.

For example, the Baltimore City council distributed a graphic by email with a list of local Covid-19 resources, but the link in the message was to a map. There was no text listing. My wife informed the council president of this on March 24, but she never got a reply. However, as of July 7, I found text for the locations of Covid-19 testing sites at the city website.<sup>77</sup> It took me about 5 minutes to track down this information in a situation where I was healthy and calm. If we had an immediate need to get tested because we thought that we had been exposed, searching for the necessary information would have been stressful.

Inaccessible websites were a problem before the pandemic, but with post-pandemic responses moving everything online, inaccessible technology has an out-sized effect on my quality of life now.

**RM:** Cheryl talked about health care rationing, and there is a larger concern about how we describe health and those at risk. Further, so many of the underlying health conditions, comorbidity factors around high blood pressure, asthma, and diabetes are directly related to environmental factors, which are directly related to racism and income inequality.

We can't talk about disability identity or ableism or the disability

community unless we are also talking about the lack of health care due to structural racism. This also connects disability, especially mental health, to police brutality and to Black folks.<sup>78</sup> Estimates are that between one-third and up to 80% of people killed by police have a disability. And so there is a lack of attention and understanding about the intersectionality of those experiences. This obviously is a huge issue that deserves more space than we have here. The Harriet Tubman Collective's response<sup>79</sup> to the original Black Lives Matter platform not naming disability is a great place to start as are following voices such as Jamie Grace Alexander<sup>80</sup> and Alice Wong's Disability Visibility project.<sup>81</sup> The intersectionality of disability and race is something that needs to be centered in current conversations about disability.

WHAT CONTINUES TO BE REALLY WORRISOME IS HOW DISABILITY IS MADE COMPLETELY INVISIBLE. SPECIFICALLY, THE LANGUAGE THAT PEOPLE USE ERASES DISABILITY, TERMS SUCH AS "PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS," OR "UNDERLYING HEALTH CONDITIONS" TO REPLACE LANGUAGE THAT SPECIFICALLY NAMES DISABILITY SUCH AS "IMMUNOCOMPROMISED" OR "CHRONIC ILLNESS".

Another important aspect is the lack of acknowledgment of how the general population is relying upon resources, knowledge and survival tactics that were created by people with disabilities. Things such as mutual aid networks, care networks, how to survive isolation, how to make hand sanitizer from home ingredients, how to organize from home, how to organize from bed. These are all things that disabled people have been doing for so long. This is not an ownership thing, but rather that people with disabilities were and are not being turned to as the experts or the knowledge bearers. They are not leading the conversations despite having the expertise.

**ABC: It seems there is much we are overlooking or not acknowledging about the needs of the disability community. My own awareness and understanding has increased tremendously over the course of this project. Without this deep dive into issues related to design, accessibility and disability, I don't know that I would have recognized these ableist instances. At one point in the project, one of my students related that as she was telling her father about the project he said that he didn't realize ableism existed. Later, when I typed "is ableism" into a Google search, the first three search completions were "a thing," "illegal," and "real." It**

**seems others are also trying to establish the validity of ableism, even 30 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Similarly, a two-word Google search—coronavirus crazy—yielded more than 660,000,000 hits. We have so little awareness or respect for words that should be limited to describing disabilities, and we as a society are using ableist language to describe the pandemic. Why do you think ableism is not better known and recognized?**

**CFH:** I don't think that most people are intentionally ableist, but there will always be exceptions. I think that most people don't understand how they would cope if they were to become disabled and then they expect people with disabilities to be helpless rather than active, contributing members of society. These misconceptions lead them to design systems (websites, services, buildings, etc.) that exclude us because they don't think we can or will use them.

**RM:** Fear and capitalism fuel this. When the pandemic began and people began talking about Covid-19, they talked about who might be more likely to catch it: elders and people with chronic illnesses. Ableism and ageism enables people to draw distinctions between themselves and those more likely to catch the virus, and the lives of those more susceptible to Covid-19 are devalued in the process.

This ageism and ableism has its roots deep in capitalism, which has always devalued bodies and minds that can not produce for the state. This became so overt in the conversations of whether to save the economy and have these specific populations die or interrupt the economy and save thousands of lives.<sup>82</sup> The fact that people in government were and still are prioritizing the economy over elders and disabled people is an atrocious display of ableism and ageism.

With this, what continues to be really worrisome is how disability is made completely invisible. Specifically, the language that people use erases disability, terms such as “pre-existing conditions,” or “underlying health conditions” to replace language that specifically names disability such as “immunocompromised” or “chronic illness”. This language gave the greater population a sense of relief in that they can convince themselves that they are less likely to contract Covid-19 because they are not disabled or elderly. We the disabled are seen as the ultimate fear in this moment. That is fundamentally ableist. Why is there that fear? Because of the constant devaluing and disposability of our lives demonstrated so blatantly right now.

**ABC: There are so many negative repercussions of the pandemic on the disability community, but have you noticed positive aspects about how neighbors, politicians, or others have responded?**

**CFH:** Personally, I have been pleasantly surprised by the high level of

customer service of local businesses that remained open, even constrained by the new norms. For example, there's a locally-owned grocery store two blocks away and we walked there with our shopping cart in March and April when we couldn't get delivery reservations from the bigger companies like Giant and Safeway. The store employees were still friendly, and the only modification to the way that they helped me shop was that they directed me verbally instead of picking out items. They would say things such as, "The chicken is in front of you." or "There's no ground beef today."

**RM:** On a macro level there has been a huge jolt of empathy into people. Their relationships to and understanding of their bodies and health and wellness and isolation have changed dramatically. In many ways these changes mirror the lives of people with disabilities. We're suddenly having to think about this on a global scale, in ways that disabled people have always had to think about.

I've also noticed how people are connecting to mutual aid networks. They are realizing they can't rely on the state to support their needs, and so they are working together on a micro level in incredibly inspiring ways. We're also making accommodations and having more understanding for people's needs during the pandemic. Because we are all going through it, there is more empathy and understanding that we can't do this alone. No, we are not all right, and there is less shame in that. There is a distinct possibility that this can turn into a long-standing commitment to more expansive accommodations post-pandemic. Further, if the connection is made to the disability community, people will have much more compassion and interest in fighting ableism because they have gotten a taste of disability during the coronavirus outbreak.

**ABC: This blog series title prompts me to consider what we have learned during the pandemic, and I would say one of the biggest things is that we now know that remote is possible. In the past, members of the disability community have asked for online work and school accommodations but had been denied because we thought they were not feasible. Now we know that they are. This is not to say that this virtual space is perfect. There is certainly much room for improvement, however for those with disabilities, it shows that the world can meet them where they are. What are other things you would add to this list?**

**CFH:** I have been mostly working from my home office for several years. There are benefits to everyone being in that situation now. Before the pandemic, I could afford to travel to one professional conference per year. Once Covid-19 hit, many conferences switched to an online format, which meant that I could attend and participate in the one I had already committed to as well as two more. I was no longer constrained by travel costs, either

the obvious financial costs, or the emotional costs, such as finding rooms or asking people to identify a presenter because I can't read their name tag or recognize a face in a crowd. However, in a virtual event, it's easy to connect electronically. An important conversation topic at all three conferences was the need to rebuild these events post-pandemic to be more equitable and inclusive without back-sliding into old ableist systems.

I have also been on informal Zoom calls with people with disabilities where we think out loud about ways we can support each other as we cope with adapting to the new normal. For example, someone said that she wears disposable gloves so that she doesn't worry about touching door handles, bus fare boxes, handrails on stairs etc. When she gets home, she discards the gloves and washes her hands. The local chapters of the National Federation of the Blind<sup>83</sup> moved their meetings to Zoom, and these calls allow us to easily share resources and swap Covid-19 work-arounds.

## AN IMPORTANT CONVERSATION TOPIC AT ALL THREE VIRTUAL CONFERENCES WAS THE NEED TO REBUILD THESE EVENTS POST-PANDEMIC TO BE MORE EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE WITHOUT BACK-SLIDING INTO OLD ABLEIST SYSTEMS.

**RM:** My community's, my colleagues' and my own commitment to accessibility have blossomed, mainly because the pandemic has constrained and impacted us in new ways. We are committing to learning and doing better in terms of virtual accessibility. For example, I did a lot to learn how to create accessible virtual events.<sup>84</sup> I had never done it myself before nor had institutional support to learn about it. If someone has the privilege to be connected to the internet, they can now connect to education, art, cultural experiences, celebrations, family and more.

In another example, I took a course on curatorial practice and disability from a curator named Sean Lee,<sup>85</sup> who is based in Toronto. The school is based in Berlin, and the students were located around the world. We were able to connect around disability on a global scale as well as focus on our own individual communities. It was educational and restorative.

More broadly, our fundamental ideas of education and resource sharing are forever changed to be more accessible. Museums have released collections online, and performances that would have cost hundreds of dollars to attend are now available to stream for free. Cheryl described the reduced costs of professional events. We now have an understanding for how this affordability—financial, emotional, educational—extends to museums and cultural spaces as well.



# Changing the conversation\*

Ableism has become normalized in many ways. One of those is through language. **Too often words that are used to define disabilities are also misused as insults.** You can help change that by eliminating ableist words such as the ones here and using the suggestions instead. How many do you use? Did you know they were ableist?

**\*Warning: Contains slurs or uncomfortable language**

## LAME

### WHAT IT REALLY

**MEANS:** Having an injury or illness affecting the leg or foot that can impair movement. Often affects a person's gait.

### USE INSTEAD:

Uncool • Strange • Faulty • Defective • Monotonous • Boring • Uninteresting

## SPAZ

### WHAT IT REALLY

**MEANS:** Short for spastic. Used for someone affected by muscle spasms. It is considered offensive slang.

### USE

### INSTEAD:

Random • Clumsy • Energetic • Silly

## CRAZY

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS:** Mentally ill. This word perpetuates stigmas against mental illness. Describing things as “crazy” can create barriers to seeking help and normalizing mental health struggles.

**USE INSTEAD:** Amazing • Shocking • Wild • Unpredictable • Strange • Unstable • Intense • Uncontrollable • Confusing • Impulsive

## MORON, IMBECILE, IDIOT

**WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN:** These are all outdated medical terms for low IQ due to different levels of intellectual disability.

### USE INSTEAD:

Frantic • Unhinged •  
Distraught • Unwise •  
Outrageous

## R\*T\*RDED

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS:** Initially used to mean an intellectual disability, it is now no longer used even for medical reasons. This word is universally considered as a slur and should never be used.

### USE INSTEAD:

Uninformed • Bad •  
Disagreeable

## DUMB

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS:** Unable to speak. It implies that deaf people are unable to communicate, which is not true.

### USE INSTEAD:

Dense • Foolish •  
Obtuse • Silly •  
Shocked • Bad •  
Ridiculous

## PSYCHOTIC

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS:** References a psychosis, which is “a serious mental illness (such as schizophrenia) characterized by defective or lost contact with reality often with hallucinations or delusions.”

**USE INSTEAD:** Unhinged • Frantic • Distraught

# RELATE / ABLE

WHAT DO WE HAVE IN COMMON?



## EMPATHY IS THE KEY TO TRUE CONNECTION

We each experience the world through a different lens. In one of the project videos, Sabrina Epstein, Marguerite Woods, Yoshi Nakamura, and Joe Olson **share their experiences** of living with disabilities. While the interviewees discuss the difficulties of living in a culture that is not as inclusive as it needs to be, they never fail to mention their abundance of skills, wisdom and incredible accomplishments.

You can view their video on the Redefine/ABLE website.<sup>86</sup>

# WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

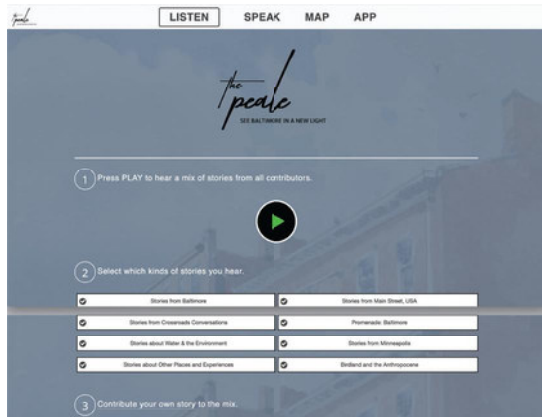
Do you have a story to tell about ableism, perhaps an experience you had with someone being ableist or something you did that you now realize was ableist? Or maybe you would like to share the actions will you take to be a better ally to the disability community?

## YOU CAN SHARE YOUR STORY ONE OF THREE WAYS:

**1.** Download the free Be Here Stories app<sup>87</sup> for iPhone, open the app, click SPEAK, and then select the Program and Question you wish to respond to.



**2.** Record directly on the Peale website.<sup>88</sup>



**3.** Call 1-833-TEL-STRY (1-833-835-7879) to record your story.



# *on losing your first language*

where i'm from  
we talk with our hands.  
at the dinner table  
my grandmother handles grace.  
mom is tracing the prayer at the tip  
of her fingers.  
i read the wrong god.

when dad asks about the thing  
you love, today.  
you are a silenced heart. a passion  
held hostage by wordless palms.  
my sister feeds me  
signs between gulps of sorrel.

i was not always mute. absence  
must be learned. i have carried too  
many sounds. their signs now fall  
to the floor. nobody bothers  
to pick them up. and i am drowning  
in what i cannot tell my father.


— MANDLA "KOSI" DUNN

Shared during the July Storytelling workshop


## DO YOU KNOW THE FACTS?


# Disability Myths & Truths


### MYTH


If you talk loudly enough, people with hearing loss will understand you better. 


### TRUTH


 **Yelling does not help.** Instead, face the person so that they can read your lips and facial cues.


Individuals with hearing loss cannot and should not drive. 

 **Being Deaf or hearing impaired has no effect on a person's ability to drive.** Some use devices that give visual alerts such as when an ambulance is near. They are no more likely to be involved in car accidents than hearing drivers.

Color blindness, which affects only men, means they can only see in black and white. 

 Although more men are affected by it, **women can also be color blind.** Most with color blindness see more muted color palettes. Only a tiny fraction of the global population sees only in black and white.

People with mobility disabilities can't drive, but every city has public transportation for them to get around so this is not an issue. 

 People with mobility disabilities can drive specially modified vehicles that fit their abilities. This can be a key transportation outlet as approximately **45% of Americans have no access to public transportation.**

REDEFINE/ABLE  
HAS GIFTED  
US WITH THE  
SCAFFOLDING  
NECESSARY TO  
REIMAGINE OUR  
COMMUNITIES  
SO THAT  
EVERYONE CAN  
THRIVE.

# Redefine/ABLE: A Moment or a Movement?

BY DR. NALIYAH KAYA

Redefine/ABLE prompts us to consider the ways in which we uphold ableist thoughts, language, practices, and policies in our daily lives. Undergirded by collectivism, it reminds us that our wellbeing is inextricably linked to that of our fellow community members. Redefine/ABLE has gifted us with the scaffolding necessary to reimagine our communities so that everyone can thrive.

One of the quotes that immediately grabbed my attention during the Redefine/ABLE design process was that of community stakeholder and exhibit consultant Marguerite Woods, “...*Inclusion is the natural order of things... diversity is kingpin... No one is better than or more than or less than. We all are. That perspective... will open opportunities for everyone. It doesn't create burdens. It creates opportunity and creativity...*”

Far too often, inclusive practices are viewed as burdensome. They feel like a burden because we have been fighting the natural order of things by creating non-inclusive societies. We continue to try and reform problematic spaces, practices, language, and policies rather than embracing new ways of being and doing. Throughout 2020 I had two family members become partially and totally disabled due to mental and physical illnesses related to Covid-19. Advocating with and assisting them has made me aware of how entrenched ableism is in every single aspect of society—even in the very spaces we expect it would be mitigated such as hospitals and rehabilitation facilities.

During this time, I have deeply pondered what a society embracing universal design might be like. One of the first things that came to mind was my experience in a Japanese airport. As I approached the restrooms, my presence triggered a bilingual auditory notification that explained the bathrooms were immediately to my left and specified where the men's, women's, and gender inclusive restrooms were in relation to the hallway.



When I entered the women's restroom I noticed sinks at different heights and that each stall was fitted with accommodations for varying needs—spaces to hold children, hooks and shelves to rest bags, grab bars for stability, and enough room for varying body types and assistive devices.

Ableism argues that universal design is too costly and benefits too few. Therefore, we have largely placed the burden on the individuals who need the accommodations to fight for them, make requests, provide them for themselves, or go without. I, too, once believed that simply having accommodations available upon request was sufficient. Yet, in those brief moments spent in that Japanese airport it became abundantly clear that when we practice universal design we make things better for everyone.

Offering multiple sink and toilet heights makes them accessible not only for people utilizing wheelchairs or with differing physical abilities but also for children and individuals of varying heights. Similarly, curbside pickups and increased delivery services have made shopping safer and more accessible for the elderly and those with compromised immune systems and

ABLEISM ARGUES THAT UNIVERSAL DESIGN IS TOO COSTLY AND BENEFITS TOO FEW. THEREFORE, WE HAVE LARGELY PLACED THE BURDEN ON THE INDIVIDUALS WHO NEED THE ACCOMMODATIONS TO FIGHT FOR THEM, MAKE REQUESTS, PROVIDE THEM FOR THEMSELVES, OR GO WITHOUT.

other disabilities. It also made shopping easier and less stressful busy for individuals by eliminating the need to navigate stores and wait in lines.

In the spoken word poetry class that I teach, we utilize June Jordan's Guidelines for Critiquing a Poem.<sup>89</sup> My favorite guideline is, "The achievement of maximum impact with minimal number of words." Applying this concept to universal design, I thought of how even just a couple of societal changes could significantly impact our communities.

If we began teaching sign language from preschool through 12th grade, we would eventually create a society where a majority of the population could sign and would be cognizant of the needs of people who cannot hear. If we started teaching children about visible and invisible disabilities, utilizing a social rather than a medical perspective, we would normalize and value differences. I still remember my second-grade teacher telling us that it took one of our classmates a little bit more time to speak, so we should be patient and respectful. To this day, I often do not notice someone is stuttering

intermittently unless it is pointed out because repetitious speech patterns were normalized for me at a young age.

When I imagine these possibilities, I am hopeful that we might realize some of them in the near future. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to change. With change comes opportunity. We are at a critical moment in time where we can choose to make our goal returning to the way things were or implementing changes that make our communities more inclusive and accessible for all. Ultimately, we will decide by our actions if Redefine/ABLE remains an exhibit or becomes a movement.

*“If you are ableist, you see our world in a very narrow viewpoint. There is so much rich knowledge and wisdom and you should learn from all things.”*

—YOSHI NAKARUMA/ARTIST

DISCARD MIS-  
CONCEPTIONS.  
EMBRACE  
HUMILITY AND  
DISCOMFORT.  
ASK QUESTIONS.  
ENGAGE OTHERS.  
NORMALIZE  
ACCESSIBILITY  
AND INCLUSION.

# Five accessibility and inclusion insights from producing an exhibition during Covid-19

BY DRS. AUDRA BUCK-COLEMAN, NALIYAH KAYA,  
AND CHERYL FOGLE-HATCH

Note: A version of this essay appeared as a guest post the Paul Orsell  
Workshop, Inc. ExhibiTricks blog.<sup>90</sup>

Redefine/ABLE began as an exploration of how an exhibition could achieve maximum inclusivity for multiple audiences. It was scheduled to open in two different physical spaces and on a website at the end of March 2020. Instead, we pivoted Redefine/ABLE to be an all-digital, virtual and social media exhibition when Covid-19 hit and our physical spaces closed to reduce its spread. Reflecting on this grand experiment a year after its first scheduled launch, we offer five insights from what became of our coronavirus-induced plan b. We share these in hopes of informing how museums and cultural institutions might successfully approach accessibility and inclusion during and after the pandemic.

## 1. DISCARDING MISCONCEPTIONS CAN INCREASE INCLUSION.

As the Covid-19 lockdown realities began to evolve in March last year, we surveyed the digital options with no real satisfying results. None of the spaces we found offered the in-person experiences we had planned, and they lacked the humanity we felt was necessary for the content. We instead kept our fingers crossed that the launches of the physical spaces would only be slightly delayed. By the end of May it was clear we would not be able to offer

these installations, so Dr. Nancy Proctor recommended that we install the exhibition content in Second Life (SL). This option had never come up while we were other seeking options for the project. In fact, upon hearing about SL, Audra scoffed. Her knowledge of the space was tainted by recollections of condescending comments from colleagues. Further, when she told another colleague about this expansion of the project, they asked, “Isn’t Second Life dead?” Given SL’s profile, it seemed like an unsuitable space.

These ideas were reinforced when Audra first “stepped” into our assigned SL exhibition space. The room was cold, digital, inhuman. However, as we worked with SL builders Eme Capalini and Gentle Heron, the once-nondescript gray box of a room transformed. It was rewarding to witness visitors moving about a room that felt alive, warm, and inviting. Further, SL offered us a way to produce the project content that largely represented our physical space plans.

In some ways the SL space was more accessible and accommodating, too. We received visitors at all hours of the day and from far-flung geographical locations. They could drop in at their convenience versus having to abide by pre-set hours, they did not have to worry about affording parking or entrance fees, and they didn’t have the hassles of negotiating traffic. It also connected our content to the SL community. These days augmented and virtual reality garner the most attention for ways to consider immersive spaces, but SL has minimal technical requirements and doesn’t require expensive gadgets. In this sense it was more inclusive as well.

The SL installation had more than 400 new and returning visitors within the first 6 weeks of the launch. This was more than we expected for our two physical spaces combined and more traffic than our social media accounts and website. It was gratifying that so many could access this work. The Second Life option was one that we had initially dismissed. Fortunately, it didn’t stay that way.

## **2. EMBRACING HUMILITY, IGNORANCE, AND DISCOMFORT CAN INFORM UNIVERSAL DESIGN.**

Learning how to navigate in Second Life was challenging, but it also gave us a sense for how those with different abilities are challenged to navigate inaccessible spaces. “Inept” barely scratches the surface of how Audra and Nalayah felt entering Second Life. Audra had only a cursory knowledge of the space, little of it positive. Trying to figure out what we were supposed to do and how we were supposed to do it was humbling and frustrating. Everyday actions such as walking, sitting in a chair, and navigating stairs were suddenly foreign. We also had to learn how not to run into things: walls, bodies of water, other avatars. During a pre-opening press event, Nalayah ran into



It was rewarding to witness visitors moving about our Second Life exhibition space that was inviting and also reflected much of the original plans for the physical exhibition.

another guest's avatar. Thankfully, everyone we ran across (and ran into!) was understanding and accommodating. If only real life were as forgiving.

As with physical spaces, digital spaces have cultural expectations. We were oblivious of SL's. Audra first indiscriminately created her SL avatar, choosing from a set of standard options. Eme and Gentle kindly let her know that anyone who had been in SL more than two weeks would immediately spot her default look and thus would not take her seriously. She needed a makeover, but she did not have any SL money, an understanding of the SL currency, or knowledge of where to purchase outfits nor how to change into them after she did. Thankfully Eme was there again with her abundance of patience to guide her through the process.

Practically everything about being in the SL space was foreign: navigation, infrastructure, social expectations. As professionals in real life, we are generally regarded as knowledgeable and accomplished. In SL, we were anything but, and it was spectacular. We were incompetent not by choice but because of how SL was designed. How frustrating—if not impossible—it must be for those who use a wheelchair to try to navigate spaces without ramps or elevators or for those who cannot see to attempt to gain information via websites that aren't accessible. We knew of the importance of universal design before SL, but learning the space was a pointed reminder. We cannot take for granted that physical and digital spaces are accessible. Unfortunately, universal design is not standard. Putting yourself in a space not easily navigated can be an effective reminder of why it should be.

### 3. ASKING QUESTIONS AND ENGAGING OTHERS CAN FOSTER TRUST AND CONFIDENCE.

Sometimes non-disabled designers and curators try to anticipate what people with disabilities would prefer or need rather than asking them. Society has stigmatized some disabilities to the point that others feel reluctant to approach them about their needs. Other members may feel superior to those with disabilities. They know what they want. They don't have to ask. Both scenarios can lead to paternalistic solutions that infantilize the disabled. Rather than assume or avoid, just ask! Even better if you can engage people with disabilities in the design and curation process at an early stage.

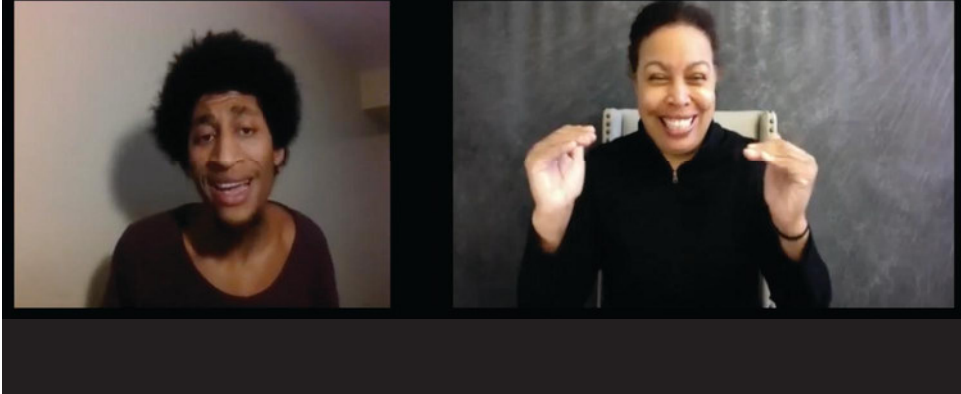
"Nothing about us without us" is a slogan used by the disability community. Engaging disabled stakeholders can complicate an already complex project, such as exhibition design, but results will almost certainly be better for it. The design students completed written reflections at the semester's conclusion and remarked about the value of this. One wrote, "Being able to listen to our stakeholders' personal experiences with disability

INVOLVE THOSE WITH DISABILITIES IN THINGS BIG AND SMALL. IT MIGHT BE TO ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS OR TO COLLABORATE ON PRODUCING AN EXHIBITION. BUT ASKING THOSE WHOSE NEEDS WARRANT UNDERSTANDING AND CONSIDERATION IS THE BEST WAY TO ACHIEVE INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY.

is unmatched. ... In my view, our stakeholders were a huge part of this project taking shape. The information and knowledge we gained from our conversations with them was invaluable."

Also, there is a difference between asking a few questions and involving stakeholders throughout the process. Another student wrote: "I still think that people have good intentions, but the slogan 'nothing for us without us' really struck a chord with me. If I were designing a product for people with disabilities, I would've always asked for their opinion, but now I would really strive to have them on the team from the beginning. In hindsight, it's really obvious that the target audience should be a part of the design process, but I really underestimated the importance of seeking feedback from the beginning and listening to their wants and needs carefully throughout the process."

Involve those with disabilities in things big and small. It might be to answer a few questions or to collaborate on producing an exhibition. But asking those whose needs warrant understanding and consideration is the best way to achieve inclusion and accessibility. The receptiveness of our



The Peale arranged for live CART transcription and ASL interpreters for the programming events. This often meant using two different interpreters for a single event to give them the necessary breaks between signing sessions. ASL interpreter Jen signs this portion of Kosi Dunn's storytelling workshop.

disabled stakeholders to answer questions, no matter how trivial they might seem to the question poser, helped the students feel even more comfortable to ask more questions. The result was a stronger exhibition in content and form.

#### **4. NORMALIZING ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION REQUIRES FULL-TIME DEDICATION.**

The Peale hosted exhibition programming. All of the events included ASL interpreters and live CART transcription. One of the conversations we had when trying to arrange for these services was if we would have audience members who needed them and should we go to the expense if not. Other events often ask that if an attendee needs accessibility accommodations such as CART transcription or ASL interpretation, that they request it two weeks in advance of the event. This boiler-plate language comes across as a half-hearted effort to be inclusive. It also puts the responsibility of requesting these services on those with disabilities rather than on event hosts. What if someone who needs these services did not hear about an event two weeks (or whatever timeframe) prior?

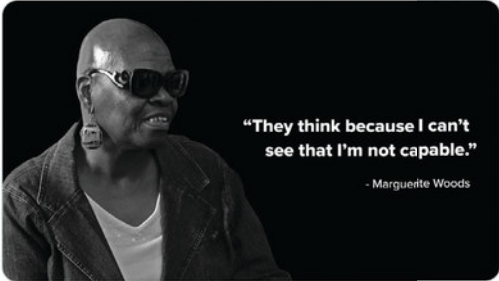
Ultimately the Peale staff decided to offer the services whether or not someone had requested them. The thinking was that to make future programming more welcoming and inclusive, you have to show you are committed. Although only a small percentage of the registered guests requested these services, this was a start and a much larger population



than before. In addition, we had event speakers describe themselves, so that those who were blind would get a sense of what the person looked like. These accommodations are now available for anyone seeking access to past programming. Audience members expressed their gratitude for these services. Further, the Second Life space and website also included alt text and other


**Redefine.ABLE**  
115 Tweets Follow

**Redefine.ABLE** @RedefineABLE · Aug 7, 2020  
 Redefine/ABLE is putting out new essays and events every week. Follow us to see what comes next in the conversation about disability, equity, and ableism.



**Redefine.ABLE** @RedefineABLE · Aug 5, 2020  
 To dive further into the conversation, visit the Redefine/ABLE website hosted with the Peale center here: [redefine-able.thepealecenter.org](https://redefine-able.thepealecenter.org) @thepeale @umd\_arhu @UMD\_ART

**Redefine.ABLE** @RedefineABLE · Aug 5, 2020  
 Whether it be including disabled designers in the creation process, or going back to remodel old buildings, making spaces accessible for all people is an essential part of combating ableism and moving toward equality.



accessible features as much as possible. The Peale is now gaining a reputation for being inclusive and accessible. Since these programs, we've attended other Zooms and webinars where these accommodations are not provided. It's disappointing and further reinforces the exclusion.

Far too often, inclusive practices are viewed as burdensome. They feel like a burden because we have been fighting the natural order of things by creating non-inclusive societies. We continue to try and reform problematic spaces, practices, language, and policies rather than embracing new ways of being and doing. Normalization takes time and a commitment from all of us to offer these accommodations as the default rather than the exception. We have the technological capabilities to standardize accessibility. Yes, these take time and resources but so do other efforts. We need to change our mindset that using these resources for accessibility accommodations means they are "lost" for other purposes. Prioritizing diversity and inclusion is a gain not a loss. By committing to inclusion and accessibility today, we make this the default for the future.

Social media including Twitter offered us a easy way to connect different content, but the impact of these posts is difficult to assess.

## 5. TRYING AND FAILING TO CAPTURE THE INCLUSION

### “SILVER BULLET” IS STILL PROGRESS.

It's been 10 months since the digital versions of Redefine/ABLE launched. Were these efforts successful in engaging audiences in learning about disability and accessibility? Are they modifying their language to eliminate ableist terms? Are visitors now aware of the shortcomings of the Americans with Disabilities Act? Although the Redefine/ABLE spaces seemed to be good sources of information, we couldn't be sure due to an inability to track such reactions. Yes, Google can tell us how many visitors came to the website, Twitter can tell us how many retweets we had, and so on, but what impact, really, did these platforms have? We implemented surveys and other participatory elements to try to track and engage audience members, but we had little participation. Trying to quantify and qualify an exhibition's impact is difficult. This one, given its many platforms, was even more so.

How can we assess impact if we cannot easily know what thinking and rethinking the content stimulated? Counting visitors is a start, but to what level are they ingesting the information? Do they spend a cursory amount of time with the information or ingest everything closely with furrowed brows? Does the information prompt them to make changes in their daily lives, have conversations with others about what they learned, or research other information? How did people with disabilities respond to the content versus those without? In previous physical exhibitions, we were able to solicit participation in feedback surveys on site, which led to a higher rate of participation. Assessment poses greater challenges as more exhibitions make virtual pivots. Asking visitors immediately post-tour to complete a questionnaire or offering on-the-spot swag to those who fill out feedback forms, is more arduous if not impossible.

Not capturing the “aha moments” also meant the students didn't get a rich understanding of how audiences responded to their work. Testing the model is a big factor in learning. The virtual options truncated this. Did we find a silver bullet? Unfortunately, we can't say as much of the results of our grand experiment remain largely inconclusive. As we continue to create virtual spaces, we also need to incorporate appropriate, inviting assessment tools to know what kinds of impact, if any, these spaces are having.

We featured people with different disabilities as part of the exhibition. One of them, Marguerite Woods, said, “Inclusion is the natural order of things. ... Diversity is kingpin. ... No one is better than or more than or less than. We all are. That perspective... will open opportunities for everyone.” We couldn't agree more. But diversity and inclusion take deliberate, constant attention to achieve. We aren't fully there yet, but hopefully we are well on our way to achieving universal design.

# About the authors

Kevin Bacon<sup>91</sup> is Digital Manager at The Royal Pavilion and Museums Trust (RPMT), in Brighton & Hove, United Kingdom. He is responsible for managing digital publishing, digital skill development and information management within RPM, along with supporting digital marketing activity. He is a Visiting Researcher at the University of Brighton, teaching on its MA Curating Collections & Heritage. He is particularly interested in digital storytelling, behavioural models for museum audiences, the social role of civic museums, and scalable digital skill development within the museum sector.

Dr. Audra Buck-Coleman<sup>92</sup> (she/her) is a designer, educator, author, and facilitator. She directs, curates, and collaborates on social design projects with underrepresented communities. This includes serving as project director for *Redefine/ABLE: Challenging Inaccessibility*, a virtual exhibit that addresses disability, inclusion, and ableism. Her work connects design students, cultural institutions, and underrepresented communities and their concerns within a social justice design context. The resulting exhibits empower minoritized communities by elevating their voices and concerns in public spaces. She is a former associate professor and inaugural design program director for the Department of Art at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD).

Dr. Cheryl Fogle-Hatch<sup>93</sup> is the founder of *MuseumSenses*, a Baltimore-based advocacy studio that researches and develops multisensory experiences for galleries, museums, and other cultural organizations. She collaborated with the UMD design students to create *Redefine/ABLE: Challenging Inaccessibility*. Previously, Dr. Fogle-Hatch worked as an archaeologist, conducting research in museum collections. Cheryl has taught college courses in archaeology at the University of New Mexico, and she has designed and led hands-on science activities for high school students participating in programs of the National Federation of the Blind.

Dr. Naliyah Kaya<sup>94</sup> is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Montgomery College. She has served as a creator, advisor, and evaluator for multiple cross-cultural community-based social design exhibitions including *Redefine/ABLE*. She teaches *TOTUS Spoken Word* experience as part of the *Jiménez-Porter Writers' House Program* at UMD where she was previously the Coordinator for *Multiracial & Native American/Indigenous Student Involvement*. She also organizes arts programming as the *Community Liaison for the Critical Mixed Race Studies Association (CMRSA)*. Dr. Kaya's work centers on the intersections of art and activism focusing on spoken word poetry and counter narratives, the self, multiraciality, antiracism, leadership, and ableism & accessibility.

Ruth Lozner<sup>95</sup> received a BFA from Carnegie-Mellon University, and a MFA from American University. She has held faculty positions at UMD, Parsons School of Design, New York, and the University of the Arts, Philadelphia. She currently holds the titles of Professor Emerita from UMD and Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts, UK. She is an education consultant, lecturing and giving workshops to artists and designers on a variety of subjects including “The Creative Process and the Art of Brainstorming”, and “Design Literacy and Visual Thinking”.

Robin Lynne Marquis<sup>96</sup> (they/them) is the Accessibility Coordinator at the Peale Center, an artist, facilitator, and disability activist. They have over a decade of experience leading initiatives, programming, and community collaborations with institutions of all sizes and people of all ages. Robin also serves as the Community Outreach Coordinator for Access Smithsonian, the central accessibility office for the Smithsonian Institution, and holds an MFA in Community Arts from the Maryland Institute College of Art. As an artist with a disability, Marquis is part of a national network of thought-leaders shaping the conversation about accessibility in the arts, while contributing to local efforts that combine creativity, education, and activism to achieve positive social change. As a Baltimore-based accessibility consultant, they support to organizations that are committed to making spaces accessible for, and inclusive of, people with disabilities.

Dr. Lara Perry<sup>97</sup> is Associate Dean for Education and Student Experience in the School of Humanities and Social Science and a lecturer in art and design history at the University of Brighton. A Canadian living abroad, she holds a D.Phil in History from York University and has worked in U.K. higher education since 1999. She is particularly interested in the role that women play in museums and her research has focussed on how art galleries and museums can promote gender equity. She is currently working with The Royal Pavilion and Museums Trust (RPMT), in Brighton & Hove, and the DeLaWarr Pavilion in the U.K., together with the Peale, to understand how digital interfaces can make museums and cultural institutions more inclusive.

Dr. Nancy Proctor<sup>98</sup> is Chief Strategy Officer and founding director of the Peale. From 2012-2020, Nancy was also Co-chair of the international MuseWeb (formerly Museums and the Web) Conferences, and edited its annual proceedings. Previously, she served as Deputy Director of Digital Experience and Communications at the Baltimore Museum of Art (2014-2016), Head of Mobile Strategy and Initiatives at the Smithsonian Institution (2010-2014), and Head of New Media Initiatives at the Smithsonian's American Art Museum (2008-2010). With a PhD in American art history and a background in filmmaking, curation and feminist theory and criticism in the arts, Nancy lectures and publishes widely on technology and innovation in museums, in French, Italian, and English.

# Project credits

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**SECOND LIFE COLLABORATORS:** Virtual Ability, Inc., led by Gentle Heron and Eme Capalini; David London, the Peale’s Chief Experience Officer; Patch Linden, Brett Linden, Strawberry Linden, and the Linden Lab moles

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**PROGRAMMING EVENT PARTICIPANTS:** Beth Ziebarth, Director of Access Smithsonian; Jeffrey Kent, Artistic Director at the Peale; writer and educator, Mandla “Kosi” Dunn; George Ciscle, Curator-in-Residence, Emeritus at Maryland Institute College of Art; Monica Rhodes, Director of Resource Management, National Park Foundation; Dr. Jeremy Wells, Associate Professor in the Historic Preservation program in the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at UMD; Noreen Smith, educator and Peale outreach collaborator; Azure Grimes, Senior Program Manager at Libraries Without Borders; Daisy Brown, the Peale’s Storytelling Ambassador and Photographer; Dr. Nettrice Gaskins, artist and Assistant Director of the STEAM Learning Lab at Lesley University; and Debbie Staigerwald, Director of Volunteers and Interns at the Arc, Baltimore.

**ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM:** Titus Bicknell, Dr. Quint Gregory, and Kyungjin Yoo



The 2020 UMD Graphic Design Cohort in the Carroll Mansion.

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*“I learned to deal well with adversity and  
from my disability, I became mentally strong.  
... I know a special experience.  
It’s like a Silence world, and it gives me the  
ability of concentration.”*

— YOSHI NAKARUMA/ARTIST

TOO MANY  
ASPECTS OF OUR  
SOCIETY REMAIN  
INACCESSIBLE.

LET'S WORK TO  
CHANGE THAT.

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