Transcript: What if Disabled people designed fashion systems?

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Note: This transcript has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Welcome everyone, and thank you so much for joining us today. My name is Laia Cargol Martinez, and I'm the Product Design Lead at Tilting the Lens.

For accessibility purposes, I'm going to start with a visual description of myself. I'm a white cisgender woman in my late 20s, and today, I'm wearing a red dress from the ASOS Adaptive range. The dress is sleeveless and has a wrapping design system, and I must say that the fabric is quite comfy and stretchy. My hair is in a low ponytail and a side parting. And in my background, there's a lamp, some plants, and also a print. And hopefully, the daylight today here in Madrid will keep me well-lit throughout the session.

On behalf of the entire Tilting the Lens team, I'm delighted to welcome you to the next session of our webinar series - “What if Disabled People Designed the World.” Today, we focus on fashion systems. But before we dive in, I want to make sure that this session is accessible and welcoming for everyone. Today, we're joined by Altan and Gay. They are going to be providing British Sign Language and American Sign Language interpretation. If you prefer to follow this conversation with captions, you can activate them in the toolbar down below your screen. Behind the scenes, I have my wonderful Tilting the Lens team, Áine, Sinéad, Emma, Emmy, and Rowena, all ready to support you. So if you have any trouble, or you need any assistance, please feel free to use the chat, and they will be ready to support. Also, at the end of this session, we're going to keep some time for questions and answers. So as we progress in this conversation, I would love you to input your questions for our great panelists in the section of the Q&A here in Zoom. We're going to be

answering all of them at the end of the webinar.

So, back to our topic. What if Disabled people designed fashion systems? I must say that at Tilting the Lens, we have some experience of this. And you're going to bear with me for a second because I'm going to talk about different projects now, and all of them are really important, so I don't want to forget any. And I'm gonna read my notes just for a minute. This experience expands from shaping British Vogue “Reframing Fashion” issue, establishing the Parsons Disabled Fashion Student Program, supporting the CFDA Vogue Fashion Fund for the Adaptive Design Challenge, and we've also published an open source for our first white paper, a playbook for organisations wanting to create a more accessible fashion experience. We've advised on accessibility and disability inclusion for the Met Costume Institute exhibition, Costume Art. And most recently, we consulted on the ASOS Adaptive Range, which launched only last week. We do this work through research, co-design, strategy, implementation, and stakeholder engagement.

But I would love to tell you a bit more about myself and why it's me hosting this webinar. As someone that struggles or that lives with mental health conditions, fashion has always been a source of inspiration, but also a safe space. Whenever I had bad thoughts or negative thoughts or anxiety, it's always been a distraction. Since I began working, I've always been part of the fashion industry. At the beginning, in fashion, marketing, and communications, but then I rapidly understood that that was only a part of the answer. What we really need is system change. That's why leading and contributing to projects at Tilting the Lens alongside an incredible community of Disabled experts means so much to me. Building solutions that actually work for our community is what keeps me passionate about this work.

However, I must say that when we were promoting this webinar, we made a promise. We said that what we were going to be discussing today wasn't going to be just relevant to the fashion industry. So I really hope that as I discuss with our panelists today, we can bring you examples, principles and approaches that can help to drive change with and for the Disabled community and that can be applicable to other industries. At Tilting the Lens, we move past asking whether a system should or can be accessible. Instead, we ask a bigger question: What happens when Disabled leaders designed those systems?

To explore this question, we're pleased to be joined by three amazing Disabled leaders, all working in the fashion industry. I'm going to let them introduce themselves, but please welcome Advocate for Disability Rights and Adaptive Fashion, Roxanne Murray; London-based Designer and Founder, Sinéad O'Dwyer; and New York-based Artist and Designer, Caity Briare.

Welcome, everyone. So lovely to have you here with us today. Thank you so much for making the time and being willing to have this conversation. I'm super excited for the next hour and to discuss with you three.

Before I dive into the conversation and to the specific questions that I'm going to be covering today, as I mentioned, I'm not going to be introducing you, I'm going to let you do so. So I would love to hear a visual description of yourself, as well as a little intro. It can be personal, but also professional. And then, I would love to know about a key moment where learning from a disabled lived experience changed or improved your work. I'm gonna start with Sinéad, and then I'm gonna move to Roxy, and we will end with Caity. So, Sinéad, please, we would love to hear more about you.

Sinéad O'Dwyer:

Hi, I'm Sinéad O'Dwyer. I am a cisgendered white woman with red hair, which is pulled back, and I'm wearing a green shirt. I have my background blurred because I'm in my very messy studio.

So I was thinking about this question of a key moment, and there are quite a few because I work with a lot of different people as models, and I've done quite a few shows, so I've met a lot of different people through fittings. I thought it was interesting to tell the story of this one garment which caused one person a lot of comfort and another person a lot of pain, which was something I had never really thought about when making it.

It's a pair of tights that wrap around the legs and stirrup under the foot, pulled up to the hips, so there's a tension running from hip to foot. On one model who has a spinal cord disability, we put them on and then after a few minutes, she was experiencing very intense pain and realised it was her foot from the tension along the leg. Then another model tried them on and, having a nerve pain condition, found that it really helped with her pain. She

ended up buying two pairs. It was very interesting because I had never thought about that garment in terms of compression or tension. It has made me more aware in those fittings to think about those garments and mention when a garment causes tension or compression along a limb. That is definitely something I learned from those two different models.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

I love that example. We usually talk about universal design and think that a specific design will work for everyone. What we really see in this example is that what benefits one person might not be beneficial to another.

Making something tailored or personalised for a specific user when we think about an adaptive or accessible product can be a better response than relying solely on universal design.

I love that example, Sinéad. Thank you so much. I'm going to pass it to Roxy now. Roxy, if you don't mind introducing yourself.

Roxy Murray:

Yeah. Hi, everyone. My name is Roxy Murray. My pronouns are she/they. I am a cisgendered, mixed race, Black and White Caribbean woman with black curly hair. I'm wearing black eyeglasses and red lipstick, a black jumper with red fur, and my background is a white wall with a teal couch, a gold shelf above me, and a white bookshelf to my right, which is probably your left anyway.

I have a background in disability rights and fashion styling. My example would be my own lived experience. I live with multiple sclerosis. I was a massive person that would wear all types of fashion, massive high heels, and layers and layers of clothing when I'd go out. Every day was a bit of a catwalk, like circus stuff.

I realised that was not liveable with a condition like multiple sclerosis. I realised that multiple layers created too much of a hot scenario for someone to move in, so there are sensory issues that I was getting from my body. I then realised that a lot of the shoes I couldn't get on because my body had changed its sensation and its mobility; my left side had become numb, so getting dressed became a lot harder, and the weight of garments

had changed how I could move in them.

From that lived experience, it made me realise how I actually bought clothing and how I wore clothing had to change. Then I also had to bring mobility aids into my life, and I started to look for different ways to create fashionable mobility aids, utilising that in relation to style, functionality, and fashion.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

I love that example as well. And I must say, I've seen Roxy two times in person, and those two times she was the most stylish person in the room. Thank you so much for sharing that. Caity, over to you.

If you could give us a visual description of yourself, a little introduction, and share an example of a situation where learning from a disabled lived experience - it may be your own - changed or improved your work.

Caity Briare:

Hello, everybody. My name is Caity. I am a white cisgender female. I have brown eyes and brown hair in two braids, with mid-length bangs with pink colouring, and I'm wearing a sleeveless blue tank top.

I would say my work greatly improved when I started to embrace my disability. Before, my disability was very limiting with fashion. As I got older, I became a lot more confident and was better able to express myself through fashion.

Clothing is still limiting, just like going out to stores, it’s hard to find something that fits me, but now I see it through a different lens of creativity and look at these clothes in different artistic ways to create a narrative.

For example, in some of my work, if a shirt is too long, I love to embroider characters and make a scene with the shirt. I scrunch up the fabric so that, instead of being too long, I alter it in a way that creates a story.

I also created a jacket with two felted characters on each side, designed as a snow coat with a winter scene. If you pulled the scarf of the character on either arm, the sleeve got

shorter, so it was able to fit me as well as an average-height person.

When I started having fun with fashion and implementing whimsicality, it became much more enjoyable, and I saw my disability as a strength rather than something that would hinder my creativity; in a way, it made it stronger.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Absolutely! We will discuss this further, but I can see many of those examples in your recent collection. Thank you so much for sharing that experience with us.

Sinéad, your garments transform classic silhouettes by combining unique structural techniques with innovative fabric choices.

How do you balance design aesthetics with practical function and fit for different body types?

Sinéad O’Dwyer:

I started my brand, sort of unintentionally, with this kind of personal revelation around pattern coding and how each brand starts with a certain body type. It's usually a very straight body in terms of having fewer curves in and out, and often very small as well. But I think I became more interested in the idea of fit, because obviously you could grade a small size bigger, but if it's always cut for a very straight body, then even when you do that, it's still going to have that same sort of straight fit.

I was reflecting a lot on stories from my mother, my sister, and my friends about things not fitting, and that sense of dismay, how you put it back on yourself and reflect all that negativity onto yourself. I became interested in trying to articulate and explain to people who weren't working in fashion, or didn't understand this idea of a sample size, that the reason things didn't fit them was because they were literally cut for someone else with a particular body. Patterns are specific, and brands do have specific models in mind.

I wanted to start explaining that, which is how my work began. As I've progressed, to answer your question, I've been thinking a lot about this particular way that the fashion system works with a singular sample size, especially in luxury. What I've tried to do over the

last five years, especially because I do shows with many different body shapes, sizes, and abilities, is work on three - and sometimes four, but mainly three - different sample sizes per season.

That means I'm thinking about three different bodies, usually choosing three different sizes, and trying to have different body shapes within that. So when I get to the point of producing the clothes, I'm not having to start from scratch and suddenly consider people later. Especially as an independent brand, when you try to consider different bodies later, it just doesn't really happen, because the design has already been made without thinking about those bodies in the first place.

I believe that good design is where I am considering that within the design phase, because it's also more inspiring when you're thinking of different solutions for support. A lot of my work is around supporting a larger chest and building that into the design. If you only start with one small, very straight shape that perhaps doesn't need much support, then later on when you're grading, you're not going to totally redesign. You end up with designs that don't really work for different sizes or shapes. So that's been my strategy for trying to improve my corner of the luxury system.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

And I think it's very smart. When we work with clients sometimes, or when you see people trying to adapt existing products to be adaptive, it's much easier and better if you start that process from scratch, rather than trying to adapt something that already exists to a certain size.

Sinéad O’Dwyer:

Exactly. I was really inspired by ideas that come from sustainable practice. When I started my brand, I heard a lot that independent, small brands are agile and can more easily implement sustainable practice from the beginning. I realised that's the same with sizing and designing for different body types. If you start when you're tiny and not producing very much, then as you grow, it's built in more.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Absolutely. Thank you so much for sharing that about your process. Roxy, coming to you.

I had the privilege of working and collaborating with you in several projects that were centred on creating more accessible fashion solutions.

I remember in one of those projects you said something that has stuck with me ever since. You said, “If fashion can create couture, why can’t it create adaptive fashion?”

I think we all need to buy caps with that quote. I love it. Based on your quote and your experience, how should fashion brands approach adaptive fashion to create successful adaptive products?

Roxy Murray:

From my point of view, there are multiple things needed to create successful products. Obviously, we all know, co-designing and collaborating with the community is the first step. Have us in the room, from start to launch, consulting on what is being created and taking our input on what we need.

When doing that, ensure those people are diverse in disability, race, gender, and sexuality, because we all want different things to express ourselves with.

It is also essential to bring in professionals, like occupational therapists, who understand it from a medical point of view to help create garments that actually work in real time for people to move in.

Testing those products in everyday life scenarios ensures they perform as intended, as many have experienced having a lovely garment that does not quite work once out in the city.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

No, absolutely. I think you touched on a couple of points there in terms of the intersectionality aspect. In every project that I've been part of, and this is a principle of ours at Tilting the Lens, any co-design project must be intersectional, and you were mentioning

all of these identities, including different disabilities.

The Disabled community is not a monolith, and within the community, there are so many different realities, so I definitely agree on that, as well as on the testing aspect. Absolutely, something that is working in the studio might not work when you are out there running to catch a bus to go to work, so it definitely needs to have that testing. Thank you so much for those examples.

Caity, it seems that we are just talking about products. I promise that there will be other topics as we progress, but this first block is more focused on products. You were talking before about different examples that you have been able to embed in your practice. And I mentioned your recent fashion show. So first of all, I want to congratulate you.

Caity Briare:

Thank you.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

You showed your collection at New York Fashion Week as part of the Parsons MFA programme, and I would love to know, as an emerging designer stepping into the industry today, how you envision continuing to drive and shape a more inclusive fashion landscape.

Caity Briare:

Thank you so much. It was really exciting to present my collection at New York Fashion Week, along with my amazing peers from my generation 15. To give a quick brief, my collection was called Chase Avenue, and it was based on my childhood games from my grandparents' house. I did a lot of textile work with embroidery and appliqué, as well as felting. That included the jacket that I was describing earlier with the felted characters.

In my collection, I created looks that could fit a body with dwarfism, as well as an average-height person. When I was selecting different types of clothing, I would look at how it could fit both body types. For example, what was shorts on an average-height person was then pants on somebody with my body type, or I did mid-length skirts that both body types could wear, as well as adjustable sleeves.

Even in the whole process of making clothes, I try them on myself because I really feel attached to my work when I can experience that as well, and it's just a lot more fun to do that. To keep doing that, I'm still newer to pattern making, but I would really love, as I progress with my brand, which is mostly just accessory-based now, to learn more about pattern grading, as well as making clothes with people who have different disabilities from my own.

Like Roxy and Sinéad were saying, listening to other people's experiences that are different from my own is essential. In my programme, I met some like-minded people, and I had that support from my classmates Claire, Emerito, and Carolyn. Claire also made an outfit for a person with dwarfism, so it was really fun. I felt more included in my programme when she would ask me to try on the work as well, because before I didn't have that opportunity. I felt included myself when my peer did that, and I know that if I wasn't in the programme, she probably wouldn't have gone that route. Just having Disabled people in spaces can help make that change. I'm just excited to build my own brand to include different body types and consider that as well.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Absolutely. I heard accessories as a priority, and I'm already excited. I mentioned earlier that we published a white paper, which was the result of research with 100 Disabled participants across the world. Within that research, we were exploring different gaps in the market, and accessories was one of them. So there you go, Caity, that's a talent and an opportunity for you, but I can't wait to see more of your work.

Sinéad, I'm coming back to you again. I first came across your work at your London Fashion Week debut back in 2022. At that time, I was working in production for your show, and I remember looking at the diverse range of bodies that you were including. There were also wheelchair user models, and I remember thinking to myself that every show should look like this.

So I would love to know, what drove you to have this intentional approach to your casting in your debut?

Sinéad O’Dwyer:

I suppose I mentioned a little bit about it earlier, I worked in the industry a little bit before doing my master's. During my master's, I realised that I had an eating disorder for many years, which I hadn't really connected before. That is where my body of research came from - realising how limited I had been, how it was shaping my life in my quest for being smaller all the time, how it was shaping relationships with other people, distracting me from my health, and keeping me from being a good friend or partner, or even just learning new things. During my master's is where I had the space to discover this, which was very profound.

So then I started to think about these ideas around pattern creating and what drives the luxury system towards the extreme thinness that we see, and how it affects people's mental health. It really affected my mental health, and this is when I started doing interviews with lots of different women in my life. That is always what has been my driving force. When I realised that, I understood very deeply how the whole popular culture operates - this cycle where if collections are made in one size, then celebrities are going to be that size because they need to buy the samples straight away off the runway. It's all to do with samples and the size they are, and how that then shapes broader culture when all the actresses and singers are nearly all the same size. It really shapes how people perceive themselves and limits them from thinking about other things.

That has been the driving force of my work. When I started making that work and then ended up having a brand and being part of London Fashion Week, it was very natural for me to extend that into trying to design in an inclusive way. I believe really deeply that it's very destructive how the luxury system sets the standard that trickles down, even if you're never buying luxury. You're looking at all those images of those people, and it's really harmful. We have a responsibility as a society to change that, and I also find it really exciting and inspiring to design for all different people as well. There's that exciting creative part where I can't imagine if I was just designing for just one silhouette, one size, and one ability, that would feel very unnatural to me now. The motivation has been personal to me, to do with my own mental health and that journey I had.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Absolutely! Well, thank you so much for sharing your process and what inspired you. It's really interesting, and I appreciate you sharing that with us.

You touched on something that we hear all the time. Something we explored in the white paper was marketing and representation. What the community told us is that they need references; they want to see people who look like themselves in product imagery, campaigns, and lookbooks. You're definitely doing a lot to create those references, and as I mentioned, that's something we hear constantly from the community, so thank you for sharing that.

Roxy, back to you. When we talk about inclusion, it can be easy to group all Disabled people into the same bucket. You touched on this in my first question, but from your experience as an advocate and researcher, what steps do organisations need to take to ensure that fashion systems account for intersectionality within the Disabled community?

Roxy Murray:

As we said before, the Disabled community is not a monolith, and we cannot create with one unified group of Disabled people in mind. We need to look at building multiple personas for the Disabled customer, because each person's needs are completely different.

For example, a wheelchair user may want a pair of jeans that need to be longer because they rise slightly higher when they are seated. Maybe they would need to be created with a thicker denim, but that denim would then cause an issue for someone who has a sensory issue. So, you cannot create one garment in relation to one kind of disability. We need to make sure that first and foremost, we have diversity there.

By doing so, we need to create co-design panels and advisory boards. I have found how useful that is when creating anything from any system, not even just fashion, when it comes to the Disabled community.

We need to make sure that we actually do not just create in one size, especially sample sizes. What happens, coming from a styling background, is that when a stylist wants to pull a garment and create a visual representation for the disability community, they cannot use

those garments because the size range does not work for the bodies that they want to showcase, which causes an issue there.

I would also say that looking to cast beyond just what is palatable in the industry is helpful. We have all just seen Fashion Week and I did not see many Disabled bodies on the runway. I saw a few icons in the front row, thankfully, but on the runway I did not. As we all said, we have seen robots and technological clothing change colour on skin, but we still do not have Disabled representation. So I think we need to consider actually bringing people to the runway, to the fashion shoots, and to the campaigns—and not as a token moment for a fashion brand, which happens.

We should also look at end-to-end digital and physical accessibility for the community so that when they shop, they are able to use websites with ease—with more visual descriptions and product videos of people actually using the garments, such as wheelchair users in wheelchairs moving in them. Then, obviously, physical accessibility is needed so there are actual spaces where the Disabled community and customers can go in and try on garments in real time.

As someone who has just given birth and as a Disabled person, I realised the maternity collections and the Disabled community have a very similar situation where the clothes are often not in-store for us to try on. Also, if you have ever been into changing rooms, they are incredibly small. Whether you are a wheelchair user who needs extra space and mobility aids, or you have a massive belly because you are pregnant and need space to move around, that is an issue. We need to look at changing that for people's joy when taking part in fashion systems.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Thank you, Roxy. I completely agree that providing a truly accessible experience goes beyond just the product. It requires a holistic view of the entire shopping experience, which is applicable to any industry, whether online or in a physical store.

What does that look like in practice, and is it genuinely accessible? What measures are businesses taking to ensure that the full journey is inclusive and accessible, not just through product or representation, but from the moment a customer enters a shop, right

through to returns and delivery?

This applies to any industry, and it is really important to not to focus solely on the product, but to consider the process from a complete 360-degree perspective.

Thank you, Roxy. I'm going to pass it to Caity now. I would love to talk about education, as you only graduated in May, so that experience is still very fresh for you.

Based on your time in the Parsons Disabled Fashion Student Program, have you noticed any inclusive practices that you think would be valuable for other fashion education institutions to adopt?

Caity Briare:

Yes, I was part of the first cohort for the Disabled programme, and actually that was the reason why I applied to Parsons. My aunt, who is also watching this, was the one who sent me the link, and that is what got me to New York and honestly has changed my life for the better.

The programme was really great, helping me financially and also helping me find a community there. I also got to meet Sinéad Burke, which was really cool. The first semester was definitely challenging because I had never...

Like I mentioned earlier, I come from a textile background, so to get into this programme without having a BFA in fashion was a big learning curve for me. I really started to figure out how a Disabled body functions in the fashion school system with the irons and making clothing, and how I was feeling alongside my peers.

Those first three months of my first semester were difficult in figuring that out, but then I was able to tell the Disabled programme that I needed more assistance, and that was really helpful. Had I not seen that there was a programme helping Disabled students, I probably would not have applied because I was nervous going into a university system where I knew I would need more help. But everybody was so kind and very helpful, which made my time at Parsons a lot better. I was also able to get a model who had dwarfism, so I could make clothes for her. Having a model present with dwarfism also encouraged another student in my cohort to make fashion for that body as well, so that was really wonderful.

Within fashion education, Parsons does have some courses. They have one that is accessible fashion, taught at the BFA level, where they have students make clothes for bodies with different disabilities.

We need more courses like that in the school system so we can motivate students to learn how to do that, because in fashion, we always look backwards. For example, they would bring out couture garments, and those were all size 6 or smaller.

If we display garments that are for different body types or Disabled body types, then we can look forward. I think that needs to be the future of fashion, alongside having professors who really support those students.

Because I know that can be very challenging for students when they are going against the grain in fashion, having professors who prioritise the work of students trying to do that is very important.

Having more Disabled people in these creative spaces, implementing classes, and having supportive professors can really change the narrative of schools and fashion, helping shape the future of fashion.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

I love that, Caity. Thank you so much again for sharing about your experience at Parsons, but also bringing new ideas that can apply not just to fashion education, but to any industry. At the end of the day, what you learn during your education is what you will be implementing whenever you are a professional. Seeing accessibility and inclusivity since those early steps in your career is really important, so I love those ideas.

I'm mindful of time and I want to keep some time for the audience's questions and answers, so I'm going to move us to the last question. I would love all of you to give me a response. I'm going to start with Sinéad, move to Roxy, and end with Caity. We need to keep at least 10 minutes, so I'm not going to say be brief - I want to hear your response, but I will keep an eye on the clock.

To bring us back to the topic of the webinar today, what if Disabled people designed fashion systems? If you had to redesign the fashion industry today to make it more inclusive

or accessible, what part of the system would you start with and why? Sinéad, I will start with you, then Roxy, and then Caity.

Sinéad O'Dwyer:

I was thinking about this, and there are a lot of things, but I think a really impactful thing would be more diversity in leadership, not just in creative teams, but across all sides of business, including accountancy, because it's a really big issue.

The speed of the industry also really prohibits progress, much like in conversations around sustainability, where designing at volume without integrating sustainable practice or inclusive design allows us to move so quickly season after season, but is ultimately the root of the problem.

In my opinion, and through my experience as well, trying to create seasonal fashion while remaining inclusive and sustainable highlights all the things I don't have time and resources for. But I do think that less design and more inclusive design, more sizes, more body shapes, and more adaptive options is where I would start.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

I love that. Thank you. Roxy, what about you?

Roxy Murray:

For me, I would start with the up-and-coming fashion and styling students, and people across the fashion community. I would start with them because I feel like students are very good at resisting change.

We should implement new fashion systems into the curriculum, starting with the fact that, as Sinéad said, everything is currently built around that size 8 sample size. We need to teach people to design with diverse bodies in mind and to showcase those garments. As you know, the V&A had a great show around disability and fashion, but we need to make that the norm where people see that and are encouraged to create with that in mind. We also need to give them better fit models and mannequins, changing how those look rather than providing only one type.

By doing so, it also helps up-and-coming fashion stylists diversify and change their shoots, as well as how they showcase designs and models.

Hopefully, if we do that, we can push the industry forward because designers will naturally adapt how they design to showcase a wider range of fashion for disability with universal design in mind so everyone can benefit.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Amazing. Thank you, Roxy. Caity, what about you?

Caity Briare:

I totally agree with what Roxy said as well, just going to the curriculum and students. As I mentioned, the Disabled programme was very helpful and what encouraged me as a Disabled person to put myself in a school fashion space, and I can only think that other Disabled students would only be more motivated if they knew that they were going to be fully supported.

I also agree with implementing more curriculum that uses Disabled body types, and not just a straight size, because I think fashion schools are still just using a size 6.

So, bringing in those diverse models, and also just really educating professors as well about how to do patterns with different body types as well, because students who want to learn that need that support as well. I also think about representation and having diverse models on runways, because it only makes me like the clothes more if I see somebody that looks like me.

So I think if we can get fashion brands to go outside and relate to more people, then we can just have a wider support system.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Totally.

It's time for Q&A, and I'm seeing that we already have really interesting questions. I'm going to pick one and throw it to you. If you feel like you have an answer, feel free to unmute

yourself.

There's one that says, and maybe this one is more relevant, how can the learnings from the panel be implemented or work for other industries, not just fashion? I think this refers to when Sinéad was talking about doing those interviews with women around her, or Roxy talking about the research process and co-design. How can those learnings apply to other industries?

I'm just going to repeat the question again: How can the learnings from the panel be implemented or work for other industries, not just for fashion?

Roxy Murray:

It comes down to the fundamentals of what we do: co-designing and bringing the community into the room. That applies to all things. As well as fashion, I am very much on the medical side of an industry.

As someone with a chronic illness, I take immune suppressant drugs and other treatments. To diversify that area as well, you realise that people create products with only one person in mind, whereas my fashion life and my medical life cross over quite often.

People often ask how I combine these two fields, and I explain that the actual structures needed to benefit the community partaking in them are surprisingly similar. It boils down to co-design principles: making sure that we are always in the room, that diversity is present, and that we are diversifying that diversity. I have often found that people create a niche group of 20 Disabled people and constantly ask those same 20 individuals about everything they are creating, whether that is fashion or a new accessible technology for a computer. I have had to remind them: We are not a monolith; I can only speak from my own experience, not Caity's or Sinéad's. We are all unique individuals, so we must remember that and consistently bring diversity into everything we do. This even applies to creating a café where someone gets their latte in the morning, ensuring there is a ramp so they can get inside, or an automatic door so they do not have to contend with a heavy door. As we know with universal design, that benefits everyone, not just Disabled people.

Take the remote control, for example. My favourite fact is that it was originally created for

Disabled people. Today, if the remote control goes missing, everyone panics because they feel like they cannot change the channel. Something created for our community ultimately benefits everyone. It is about looking at universal design and including Disabled people in the room.

A product does not need to be 'Disabled-first' to involve us.

Some people think a project has to be specifically for disabled users to have a Disabled person in the room. Bring us into every room. We have so much great innovation to offer and present to people.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Totally. To add to this question, whenever you are co-designing and bringing a collective of people together to share their lived experience, you should not be focused on personal details or medical specifics. For instance, when considering digital accessibility, the critical element is not simply that a user is blind or unable to see something; the important aspect to reflect on and create solutions for is how they use assistive technology to engage with content, and to brainstorm alternative ways for them to interact with specific elements. It is always vital to go beyond personal details or specific medical considerations and focus on co-creating actionable solutions.

Mindful of time, I am going to pick another question so we can wrap up on schedule. Another attendee asks, "For the audience outside the fashion industry, what is the one thing they can do to create Disabled leadership and design better systems?"

Sinéad, you touched on this when you mentioned leadership as one area you would change. Do you have any ideas that could apply to other industries regarding how to create a more inclusive leadership environment? And it might be something that you've seen in fashion, but that can translate and can be also helpful for other industries to consider.

Sinéad O’Dwyer:

Because I'm very much in this industry, something that I constantly encounter is building design. So many studio buildings I'm in, residencies, or office buildings are just totally inaccessible. I encounter that all the time when I'm doing castings, or if I wanted to have an

intern who couldn't use stairs. It becomes really difficult for me to have a diverse team in terms of physical feasibility because of buildings, at least in London. So I think something really important is to adapt buildings and build differently.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

I think it's definitely a good answer. Anything related to the built environment is essential. If you have to enter a building that is not accessible to you, how are we going to achieve a Disabled CEO if that person can't enter the building?

That's an amazing answer, thank you for that.

I think we have time for one more question. I'm just going to try to find one that is more relevant for Caity, so bear with me a minute.

So, for athleisure brands, as this helps people with some disabilities stay healthy and keep active, what needs to change in products? Is there anything that stands out? Maybe you've seen something in the industry that can be improved, or a really good example out there. You might not have the answer, and that's absolutely fine—I can pick another question.

Caity Briare:

Well, I think with clothing in general, it's important to take into account different accessibility needs in regard to the construction of the garment. For example, if there are zippers on the back of things, that's really hard for myself to put on, so zippers on the sides are better.

When we think about not just how the clothing looks on a body, but how a person is going to get into it, that makes it more accessible. Athletic and athleisure brands can look at that as well. Even what Roxy was saying regarding people who use wheelchairs, looking at longer lengths in trousers as well. So it's not only about the sizing, but the whole act of getting dressed as well.

Laia Cargol Martinez:

Absolutely. I love that. Thank you.

All right, well, we've covered some of the questions, not all, but I'm mindful of time. The

ones that haven't been answered today will be included in our newsletter and in our communications after the webinar. So don't worry, we will answer all of them, and if necessary, we will reach out to Sinéad, Roxy, and Caity to find the right responses for you.

I want to thank everyone for joining us today. And of course, a huge thank you to our brilliant panellists, to all the attendees, and to everyone who has contributed to the Q&A section. This has been a great conversation, so thank you for that.

Also, the full recording, the transcript, and the captions will be available at tiltingthelens.com within the next week. Bear with us, we will make that available very soon.

If you are not yet subscribed to our newsletter, please do so. We always share news regarding our events or case studies, so you will always be the first to learn about anything that we do.

We have been talking about co-design all the time. So if this is something you are interested in and would like to be part of, at Tilting the Lens we have a Research Hub. This is a collective of Disabled participants who want to be part of research or co-design projects that we do at Tilting the Lens.

I believe my team is going to input a link for you to join the community, in case that's something that is interesting for you.

If you are interested in our services - research, co-design, strategy, implementation, stakeholder engagement, you can reach out to us via the email team@tiltingthelens.com.

And before I wrap, I want to thank Altan and Gay for providing BSL and ASL today. And of course, to my brilliant team at Tilting the Lens, Áine, Sinéad, Emma, Emmy, and Rowena, thank you for being behind the scenes and supporting with everything tech-related.

A huge thank you again to everyone who has joined us, and I hope to see you very soon. We're doing another webinar at the end of the year, so I hope to see you there.

Bye. Thank you.

[End]

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