

# Beyond Compliance: Best Practices for Designing Inclusive Products



**Hannah Wagner**  
**In-Vehicle Accessibility & Inclusive Design Lead,**  
**General Motors**

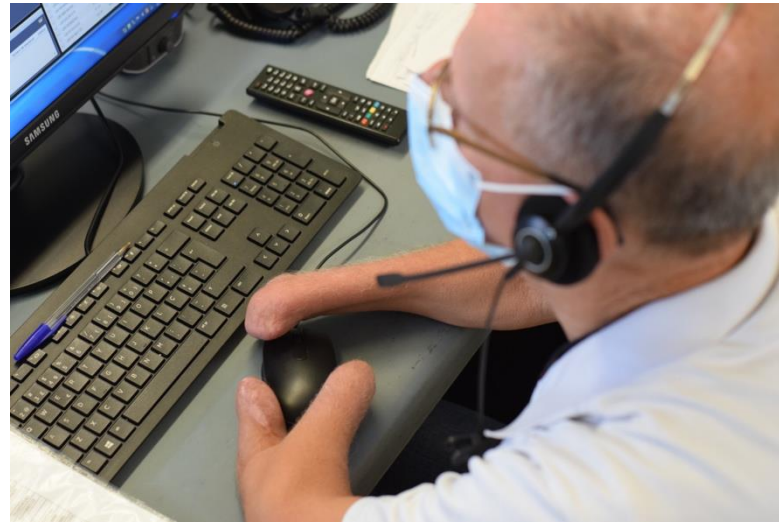




**everybody in.**



We pioneer the innovations that move and connect people to what matters.

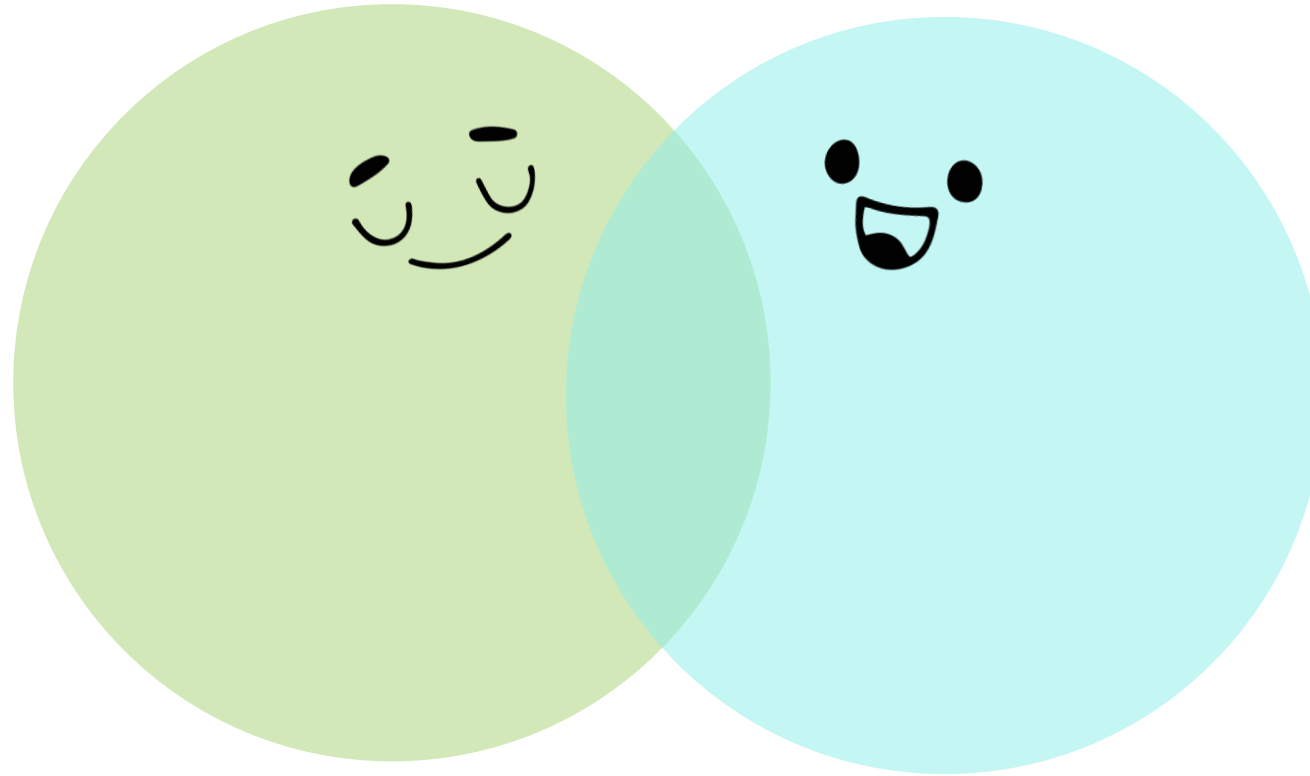


**"Almost every one of us**  
will be permanently or  
temporarily disabled  
at some point in life ."



**Margaret Chan**  
Director General of WHO (2007-17)

# Partners in A11y Justice



## ADA Compliance

- Rooted in Regulation
- Mostly Pre-Defined

## Inclusive Design

- Rooted in Empathy
- To be Explored

# What *is* Inclusive Design?

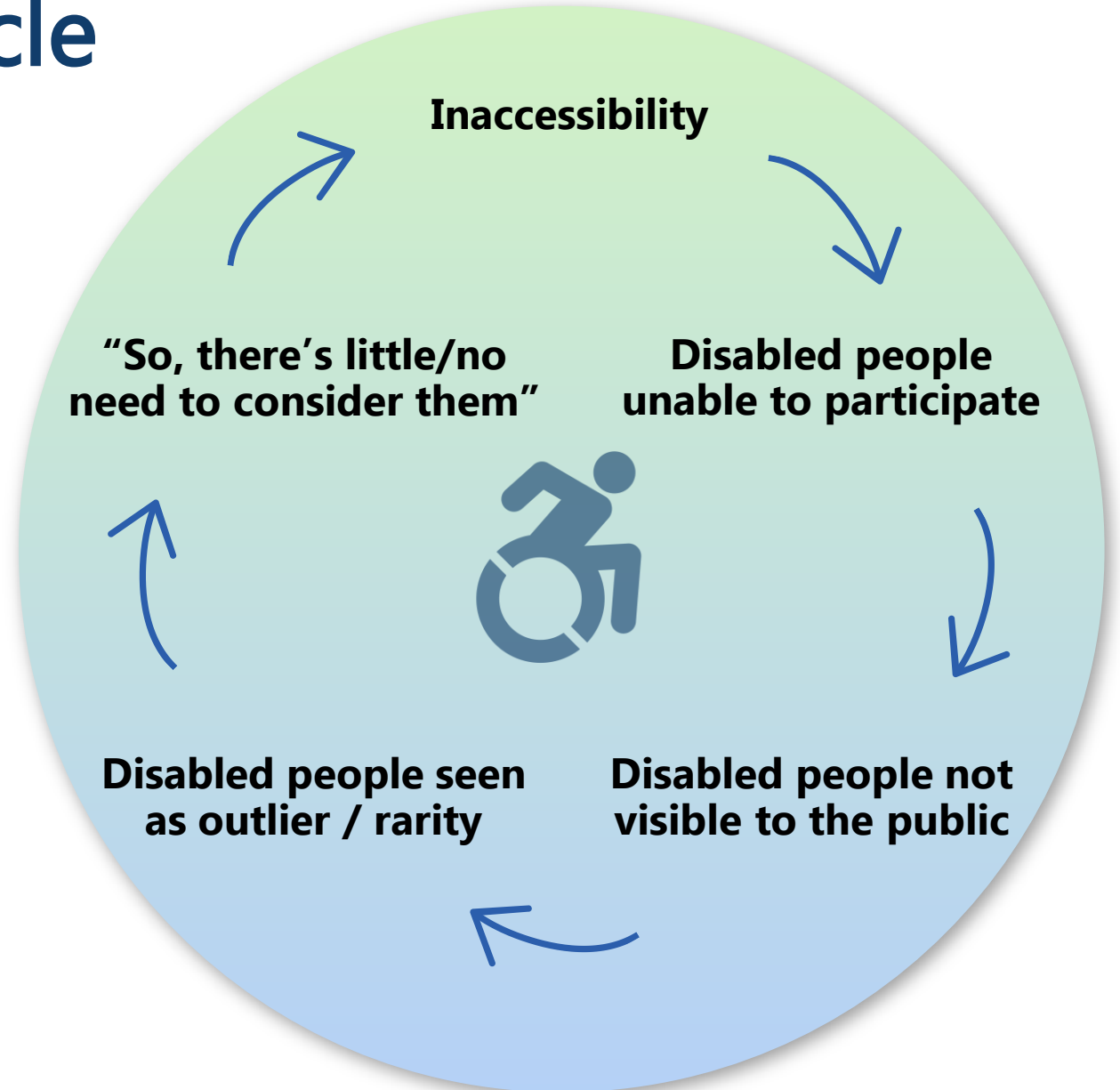


“Inclusive design doesn’t mean you’re designing **one thing for all people.** You’re designing a diversity of ways to participate so that everyone has a sense of belonging.”



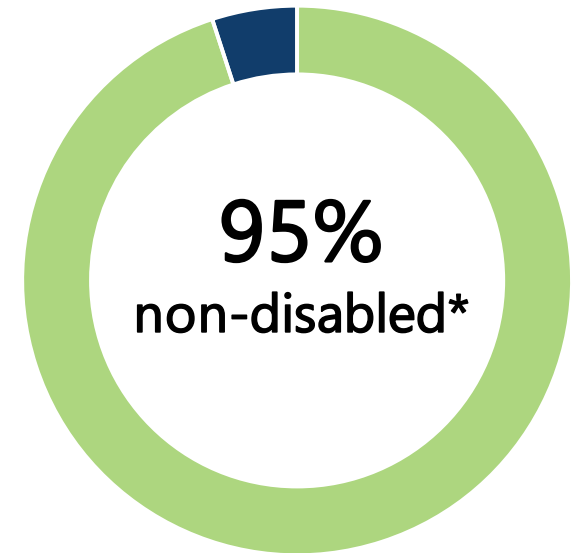
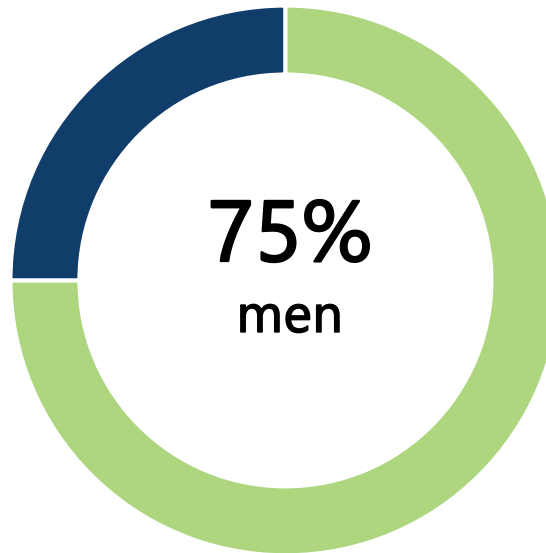
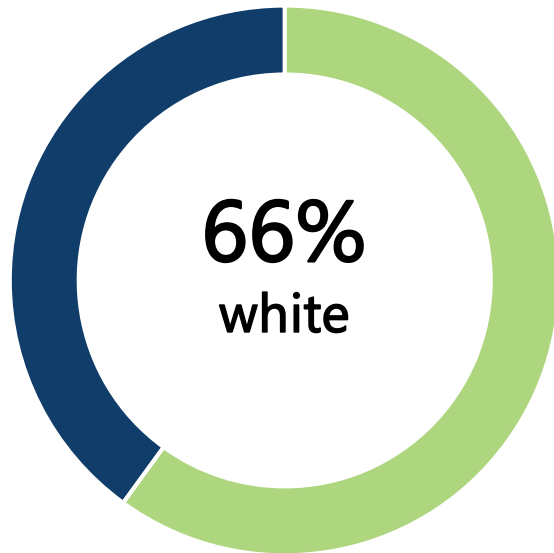
**Susan Goltsman**  
Founding principal of MIG Inc.

# The Inaccessibility Cycle





# White, non-disabled men are dominating in Tech *(and Buying Power)*



\*Very little data is out there about people with disabilities in tech because many tech companies don't report that figure. I used GM because we do provide that data. About 5% of new hires self-identify as disabled at GM in 2021. Clearly, we still have a long way to go.

# 1. Focus on exceptional cases.

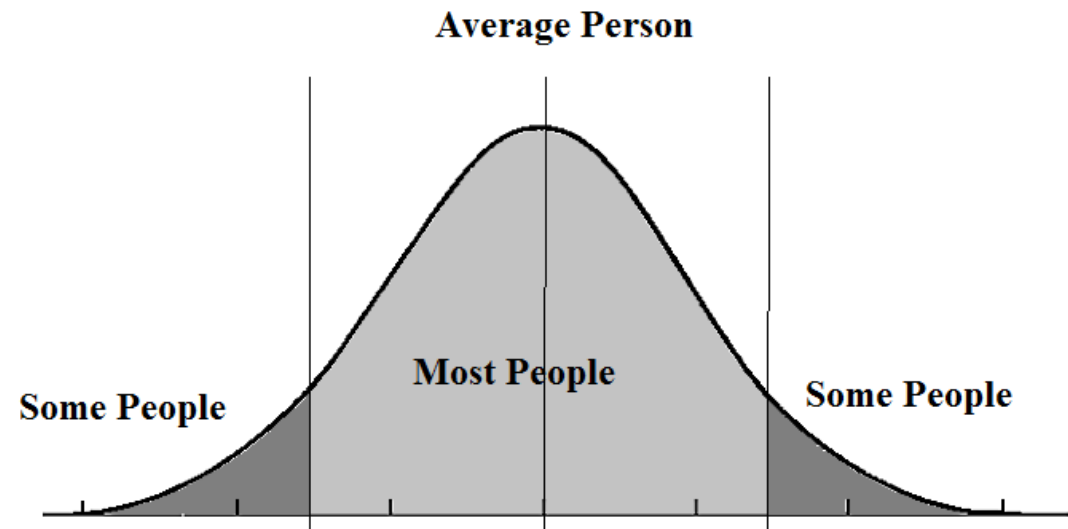


# The Downfall of Designing for “Normal”

... solutions that are for everyone and no one.



USAF designed their first cockpit in 1926 based on the averaged physical dimensions of hundreds of male pilots.



# Reframing How We Think About Solutions

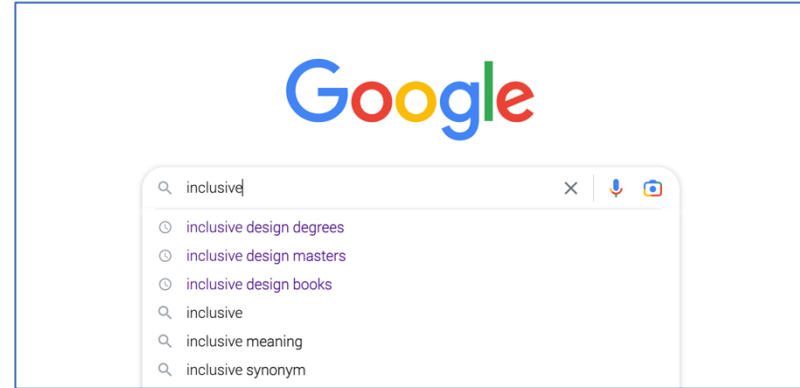
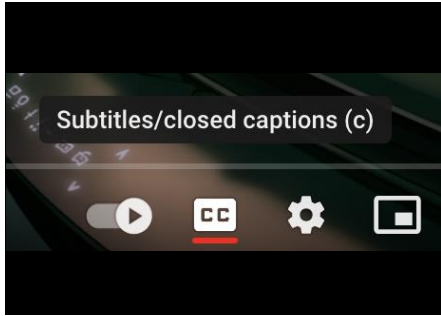
Ask questions like:

- How can we design for individual fit?
- How can we create solutions that change over time with our users?
- Design for one, extend to many.



Example from *Mismatch* by Kat Holmes

# Designing for edge cases helps us innovate.









NOTHING  
ABOUT  
US  
WITHOUT  
US

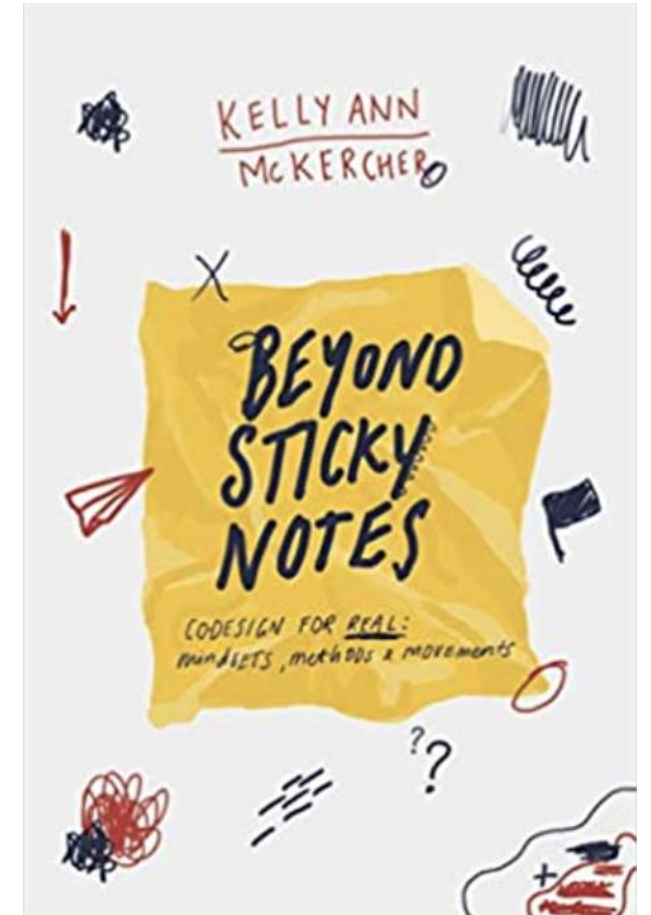
SOUTH AFRICAN DISABILITY  
RIGHTS + YOUTH ACTIVISTS

Artist: Nina Sepahpour

# What is Co-Design?

**Co-Design is the method of actively including those with lived experience into (and ideally throughout) the design process.**

- When we involve others in the design process, it returns dignity, power, and choice to the people.
- Co-Design is a process, not an event.
- Once people with lived experience are no longer in the room, they no longer have a voice.
- Ideally, we are also held accountable by the community.
- Co-design does **not** include gaining feedback to justify decisions that have already been made.
- Co-design is based on cooperation, not extraction or transaction.





# The Pitfalls of Designing in a Vacuum



The advertisement features a central illustration of a red Dodge La Femme car with its driver-side door open. A chauffeur in a white uniform and cap is assisting a woman in a long, light-colored coat and hat. To the right, a vertical strip shows various accessories: a pair of high-heeled shoes, a handbag, and a suitcase. The car's name 'La Femme' is written in a large, elegant script at the top left, and 'Dodge' is visible on the front fender. The overall style is a classic mid-20th-century illustration.

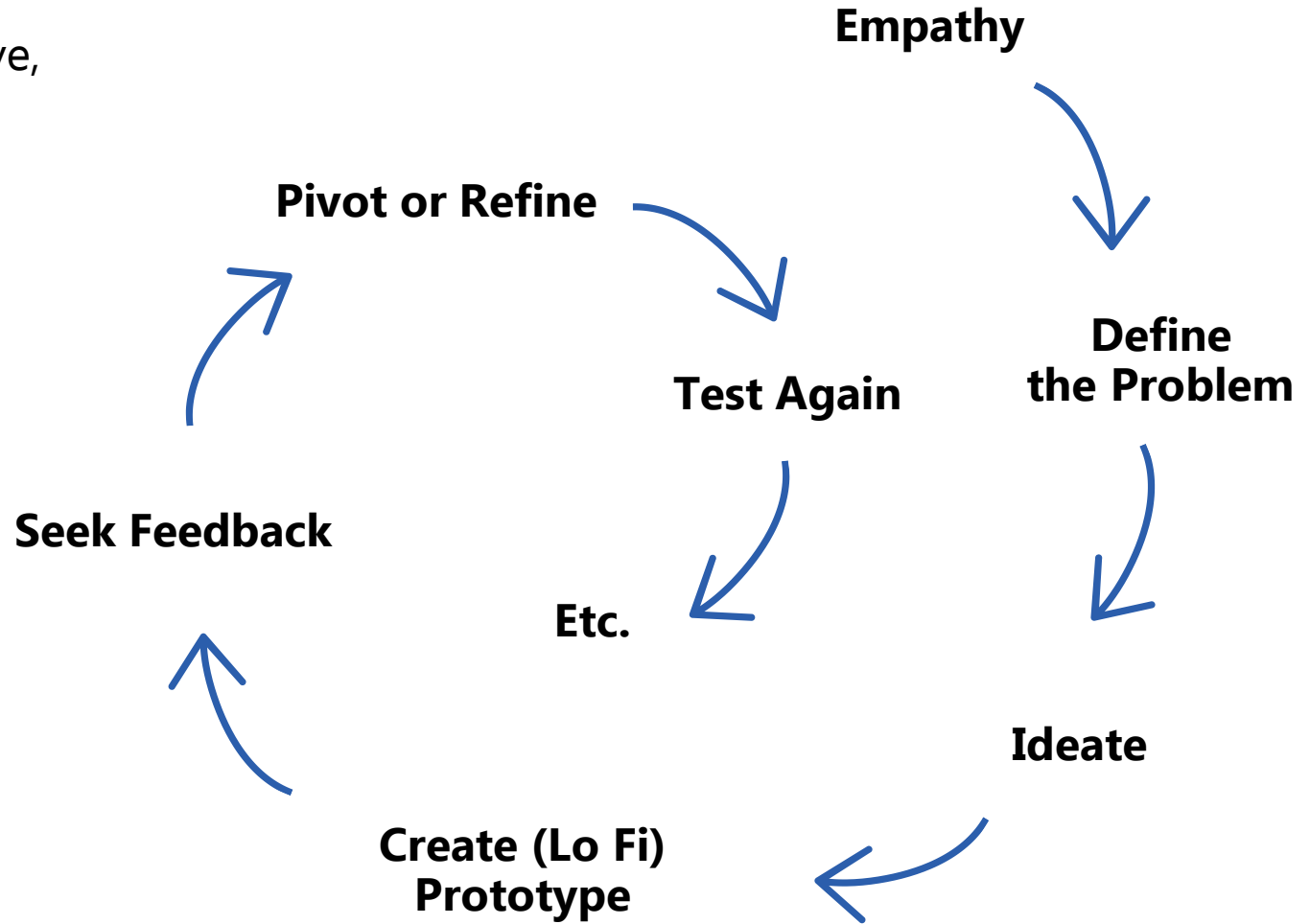
*La Femme*

now for the first time anywhere, a car glamorously, *Personally Yours*

Never a car more distinctively feminine than *La Femme* . . . first fine car created *exclusively* for women! In this superbly designed car, Dodge brings together luxurious, delicately-toned interiors and ultra-fashionable appointments . . . every sophisticated touch your heart could desire! Here is, truly, the ultimate in fine motoring.

# Getting it Right

The result is more innovative, inclusive, adaptive, and resilient designs.



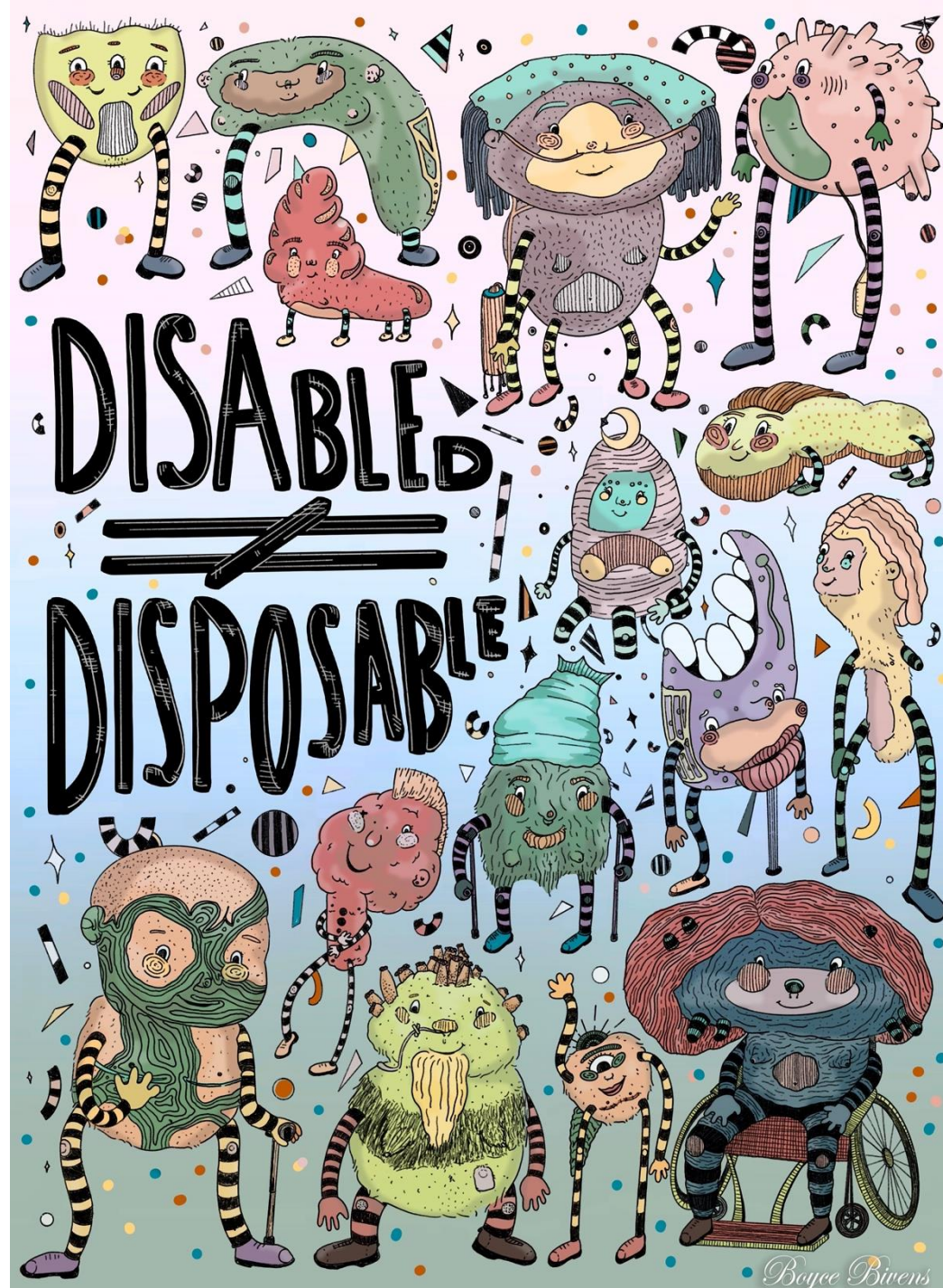
Quant vs. Qual  
- or -  
'The What' vs. 'The Why'



# Avoid Shortcuts

Nothing replaces working directly with people who have a real, lived experience. While the following sources may be useful supplementally, they cannot substitute a real lived experience:

- ChatGPT (or other AI)
- Experts
- Caregivers
- Online Research
- Quantitative Data
- Disability Simulation
- User Personas



# 3. Slow down.



Artist: 58 Creativity

## *What if I say the wrong thing and offend someone?*

*Am I the right person to be speaking up?*

*Am I asking the right questions?*

*How do I find disabled people to talk with?*

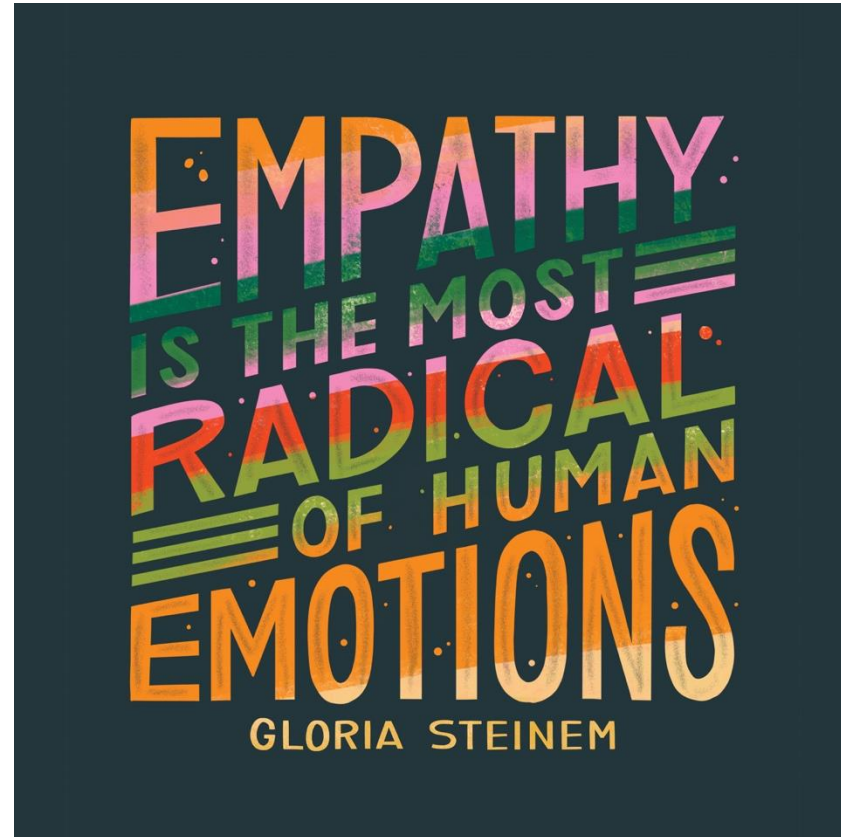


*What if I act awkward and embarrass myself?*

*I don't know the right terminology.*

*What if our concept isn't received well by the disability community?*

# Start with empathy.



Etsy Artist: RachelELettering

Familiarize, humanize, and engage (appropriately).

“When a flower doesn’t bloom,  
you fix the environment in which  
it grows, not the flower.”



**Alexander Den Heijer**  
Dutch Speaker /Writer



# Think it through.

- Follow current disability etiquette
- Be sensitive to the disabled cultural climate
- The tone you set (internally and externally) is paramount:
  - ✓ *Don't inspirationalize.* People with disabilities don't need or want praise for living their lives
  - ✓ *Don't pity.* Disabilities in and of themselves are not sad or tragic
  - ✓ *Don't patronize.* Don't talk to people with disabilities like they are children



Etsy Artist: AQuietRiot



# Have a 'get it right' over 'get it done' attitude.

- Make sure you're pursuing accessibility and inclusion for the right reasons
- Fostering trusting, cooperative relationships takes time
- Build in time for empathy and feedback from the start
- Actively look for knowledge gaps
- Don't force a solution – listen for it



# 4. Design Principles



# Be mindful of assumptions and hidden biases.

Ask yourself:

- Who am I excluding?
- Do I really know \_\_\_\_\_ is true, or am I making assumptions?
- Have I asked more than one person with a lived experience about this?



Etsy Artist: PowerToMyPeople

# Pursue bite-sized, but ambitious goals.

- What changes are within reach?
- Outcomes, not outputs
- Method changes over one-time results
- Think of the change in trajectory

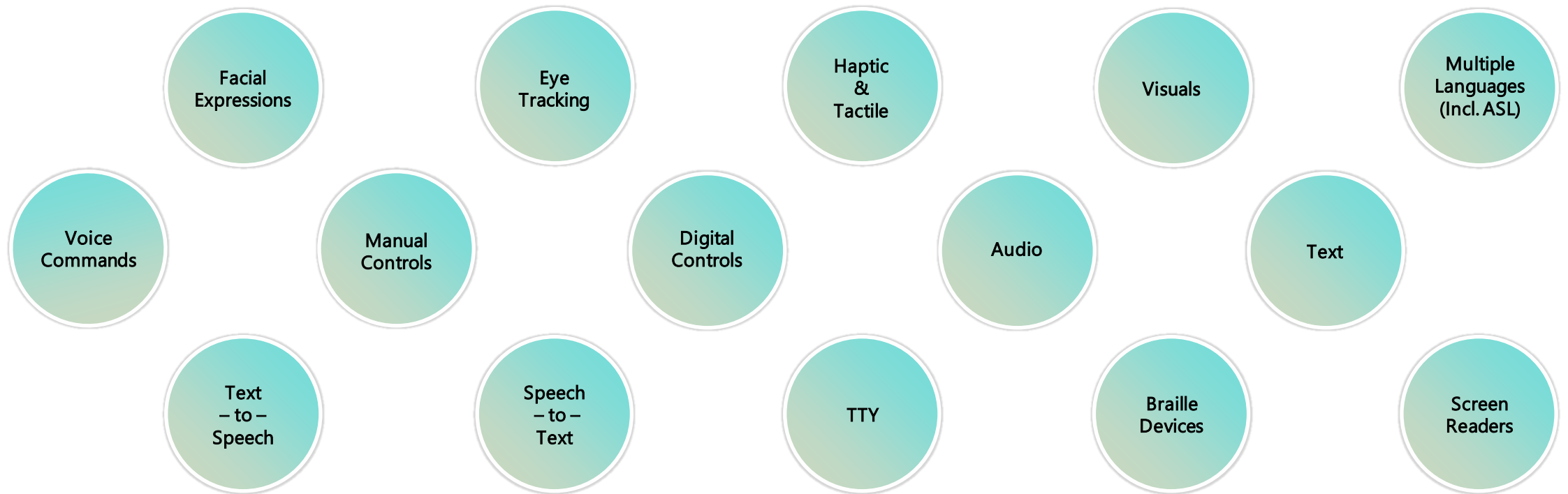




# Customization is key.

Multimodality means **having or using a variety of modes or methods to do something.**

Whenever possible, create multiple ways for the user to perform an action and to receive feedback. There is not one means of engagement that works for everyone.

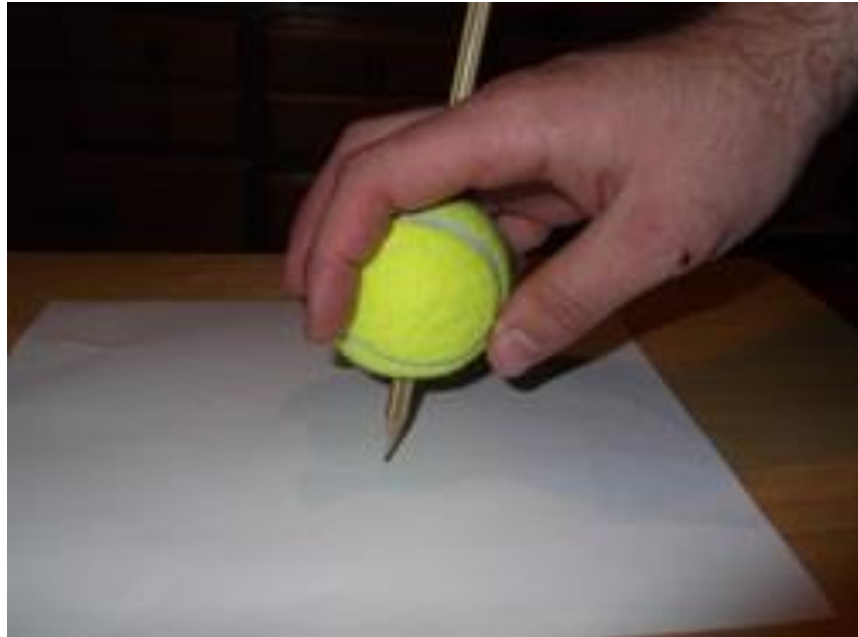


# Question whether your idea is truly useful.

Empower with privacy, discretion, and security:

- Consider users who may not own or feel confident with smart technology. What about people who don't have smart tech? Are they left out?
- Weigh the pros and cons of using personal data as we move into AI and other predictive/adaptable tech. Is the outcome worth it to them? If so, ensure data is used and stored responsibly.
- Consider how sensitive information is stored and presented to users who use screen readers or audio-visual inputs and feedback.
- Just because we *can* do or create something, doesn't mean we *should*.

# Avoid over-engineering.



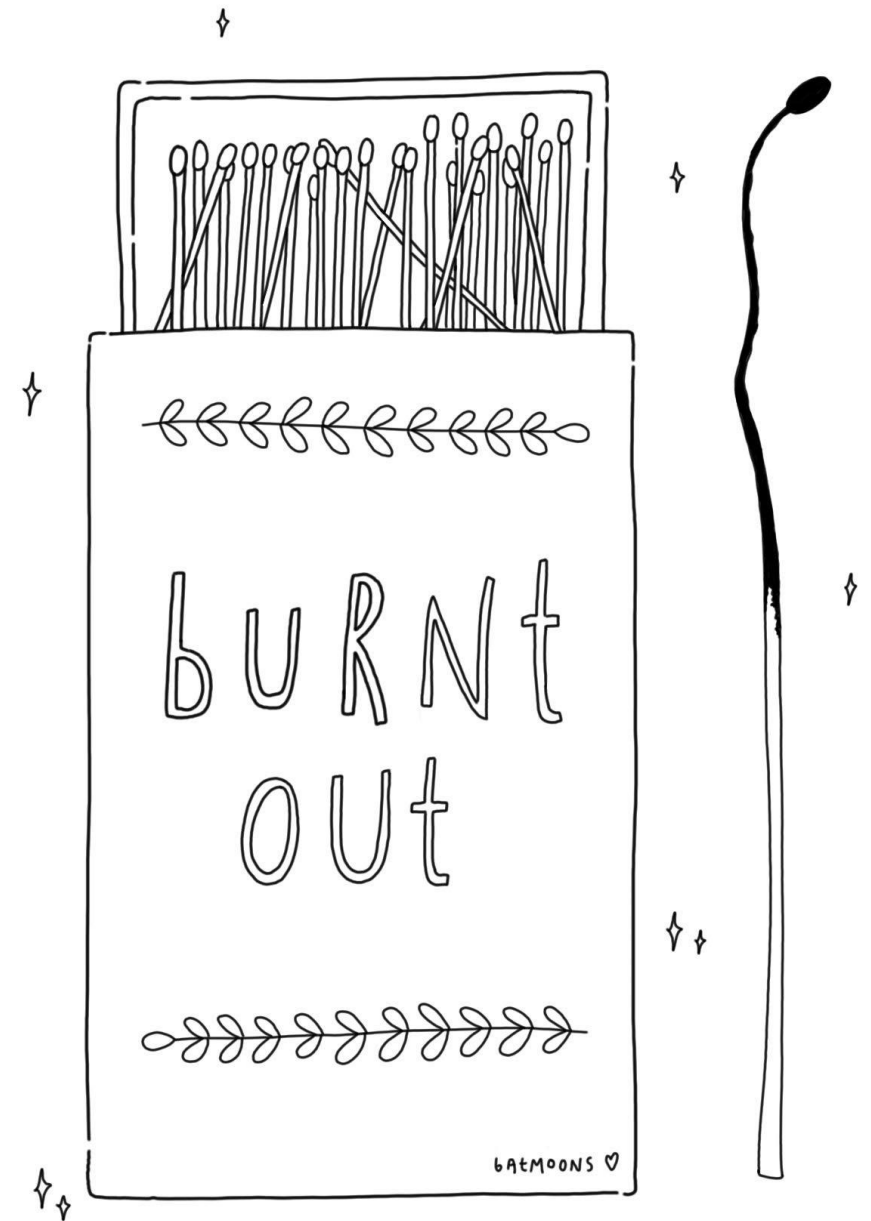
A tennis ball can be used as an assistive device for people who struggle with grasping small items.



Microsoft's Surface Adaptive Kit

# Prevent advocacy burnout.

- Don't try to boil the ocean
- Movements require many people
- Find your people and support each other
- Celebrate the wins
- Find joy in connecting with humans
- Unplug



Etsy Artist: batmoons



# 5. Keep learning.



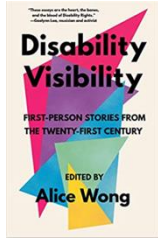
Do the best  
you can until  
you know better.  
Then when you  
know better,  
do better.

*- Maya Angelou*

Etsy Artist: MotiveArtPrint

# Resources

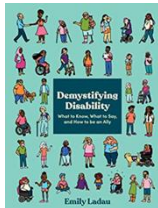
Successful inclusive design requires deep understanding and empathy. Immerse yourself in voices from the disabled community.



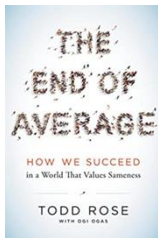
**Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century**  
Edited by Alice Wong



**Mismatch: How Inclusion Shapes Design**  
by Kat Holmes



**Demystifying Disability: What to Know, What to Say, and How to be an Ally**  
by Emily Ladau



**The End of Average: How We Succeed in a World That Values Sameness**  
by Todd Rose



**Beyond Sticky Notes: CoDesign for Real: Mindsets, Methods and Movements**  
by Kelly Ann Mckercher



**I'm Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much**  
Ted Talk: [watch it here](#)



**My Disability Roadmap**  
New York Times: [watch it here](#)



**Crip Camp**  
on Netflix

# Questions?

Artist: Malls LeMier of [disgaybledesigns.com](http://disgaybledesigns.com)

