

Inclusive Hot Topics with Jess Mitchell

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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00:10

Zoya:

Hello, and welcome to another episode of Inclusive Conversations. Today we are chatting with Jess Mitchell, who is a Senior Manager of research and design at the Inclusive Design Research Center at OCAD University. So we first met Jess while in graduate school when she substituted for one of our professors for one or two classes, and we had such a rich and insightful dialogue with her, we learned so much, and yet not quite enough. You know, we just wanted to keep talking to her more and more and more so we could keep learning from her experience and her practice in this area. So we felt like this would be a great time to catch up with Jess about some hot topics surrounding inclusion and diversity. So here is our chat with Jess.

01:10

Zoya:

Okay, well, just getting started. Thanks for being here Jess, we are excited to see you again and talk to you again, because we really enjoyed when you were substituting in our class. We had really good conversations with you. So we thought when we were thinking, who do we call to get this like off the road and just launch it? We were like we need to talk to Jess.

01:34

Jess:

I'm honored. It's great to see you both. It's really lovely.

Tania:

Yes, it's been a long time. We've been missing classes.

I know that when you're in the final years of graduate school, you want to hurry to be over. But now I find myself missing classes.

Jess:

Isn't that isn't that the way life goes you want? You want to rush, rush, rush. And then all of a sudden you want to slow down?

Tania:

Of course, and that also why we're doing these conversations. Just to talk to people about inclusive topics and get the conversation going.

02:17

Zoya:

So before I jump into "Hot Topics of Jess", I was gonna ask you if you could just give us a little background into how you ended up being Jess at the IDRC?

02:30

Jess:

Oh, it's a great question. I have a really strange and wandering path, I think. Before I sort of had jobs, I was a student. And I would pair what I was studying, which was largely philosophy, political theory, sociology, a lot of theory, political and social theory, with technology with computers and computer systems. And it seemed to make sense for me, you know, in a lot of ways the two connected. So I liked the immediacy of computers and I liked it in contrast to what felt like a slow and methodical intellectual pursuit, in theory. I liked the practice, to balance out the theory, and the grounding in what was really going on in the world. And computers and the Internet, just transformed everything. Social interactions, it exploded everything. So I was doing that sort of thing and it's funny, I worked with somebody who worked in school to work in a nonprofit to help people sort of make that transition because the transitions are really big times when life changes, and you have to make decisions, and those decisions have a tendency to open some possibilities in some areas and close them off in others. I was terrified of closing off possibilities, because I had no idea what I wanted to do when I grew up, you know, that kind of question.

So he said to me something that has stuck forever. He said, for many people, a career is more like a sailboat tacking. It goes from one point to another. And it's only in retrospect that you can look back and draw a kind of an arc or a line that shows the trajectory. And that made so much sense to me because I always, you know, I was searching for some way to understand what I was doing, because I wanted it to be something that might actually turn into a career. And I was tacking from side to side. So I worked in technology. I worked new technology - I would come into an organization largely in higher ed, and sort of redefine a role in it. I wound up doing things that we would call special projects. I was interested in the combination of people doing something innovative and unique, and the technology's just empowering that.

05:23

So then, and then I went to Africa, which sort of felt like a really big moment. Personally, and professionally, I spent a year in Africa and West Africa and Ghana. And I was working on a national telecommunications infrastructure project. And it was mind blowing, because it was about 10%, technical and 90%, social and political. And I thought, wow, this is so amazing to have this kind of opportunity. And just as the sailboat tacking, each opportunity led to another opportunity that had some features of the previous work and some new features. And, I was actually talking to my mentor, Brian Campbell Smith, who used to be the Dean of the Faculty of Information, at University of Toronto. And he was somebody I would talk to every three years or so he would poke me and find out what I was doing and whether or not he could scoop me and get me to move close to him and work for him.

And Jutta was on the call. And because of the circumstances of my life at the time, I couldn't move to work near Brian at that point. And once Jutta realized that she said, "well, you know, what about working for me?".

So in true, wonderful, amazing Jutta fashion, she changed my life. So I started working at the IDRC, I found that she was somebody who could understand this notion of the undefinable, like special projects. You do something, you do this meaningful thing that we haven't defined well into a role, you do some project management, you do some community building, you do some outreach, you do some thinking and writing, and I feel so lucky to have been on this journey with her. So that's how I wound up there. She scooped me from a job interview call.

07:38

Zoya:

That sounds kind of magical, actually.

07:43

Jess:

Again, in retrospect, I have the nicest sailboat, I love my sailboat. And I have a lot of luck. It's a lot of luck. And then it's this interesting phenomenon of opportunities being made available to you. And it's something I reflect on a lot, because this is where inequity comes up. And it shows up in education very early in life for many people. And that is opportunities beget more opportunities. And if you don't have access to opportunities to begin with, it's very hard to get your sailboat moving. So I had, I mean, people sort of generalize and call this oh, "privilege", I think that it's, it's more than privilege, breaking privilege down, it's being in the right place at the right time. Having the right skills, because you got those skills, you get more opportunities, because you got an opportunity, other people feel more comfortable sort of investing in you or betting on you. And so you get the next opportunity. And we see this, you know, in all areas, and it's very tough, because I know that the people want to be able to reproduce the path, but I don't actually think that um - I don't think that my sailboat is reproducible. I don't think it's the sort of thing you could scale, or is the sort of thing you would encourage people to do. And it worries me because I think we need more people who fit into that not so well defined, doing special projects, thinking about people thinking about culture, politics, social dynamics, social justice, and thinking about something like technology and how they all intertwine.

09:38

Tania:

I know, I think it's easy to relate, in the sense that we've all been at those crossroads and every opportunity, like you said, means you have to let go of something else. But also, how you as you mentioned, of course, if it's a lot of luck

09:58

Jess:

Well, it's luck. Then opportunities come because of previous opportunities. So the lucky moments are innumerable. I can point to them and say that that was the lucky moment where I applied for a job with Brian Kentwell Smith, and that he actually called me back and then met with me at a tea shop in Boston on his way to North Carolina. He was going to

Duke University, be a chair in new technology, and society. And here, he got this application from this person who had a background in philosophy and technology, it just, and we had an amazing tea. And, you know, he changed my life, he and Jutta really been those crossroad moments where I can point to and say, Yep, that's where it happened. And, you know, I'm very cynical about things like career offices, universities, helping students out, because how do you help somebody when it's these moments of luck? How do you make those connections? I mean, I was pursuing something that other people didn't define easily. And that's not always a good bet. And you can go further back and say, well you know, you had a lot of privilege to be able to follow something like that. And I certainly did. And I had no idea where it would lead, but I was following my own curiosity. And I think that that's one of the things I worry about the most is that so many people don't have the opportunity to follow their own curiosity and education. And I can't, I can't think of education without curiosity, and it becomes rote memorization. It doesn't, you know, touch your soul. It doesn't change you, it doesn't, you know, sort of knock your socks off. It makes me sad that so many people don't have that.

12:14

Zoya:

Yeah. I feel what you're saying. I'm from the Caribbean, from an island called Barbados, and I think, like I did my undergrad in graphic design, but when I think about it, if I followed my curiosity, I don't think I would have done that. I think I would have done something more undefinable like philosophy, like you're saying and stuff like that, but I wouldn't have known what to do with it. But that would have been where my sailboat would have just needed to sail.

Jess:

And you can only do that if you I think have either tremendous self-confidence, which I did not have, or you were really good at making justifications, which I was. So my justification for following my passion, and these areas was, it was a good foundation for my mind. I was interested in thinking, and I liked what happened when I read philosophy. I don't know that I got all of it. I don't know that I was a very good philosophy student, but I liked what happened when I would see something new and just be floored by it or I would see something from a different perspective than I had myself. And it would just floor me. And it would motivate me in so many ways too. It would motivate me to go follow more curiosity to understand about other cultures to understand what other people were thinking. Understand how other people were motivated. And to me that felt like the most real thing, the most practical application of social and political theory. It was how people were living and making decisions and why they were making the decisions they were making. But I was good at justifying it, because I would say, this is just training my brain. At any moment, I could choose something very practical. I don't know if that was true but I was very good at convincing myself and I think a few other people that I could do something.

14:36

Zoya:

Well, it all led us here so I'm gonna jump into the first topic that we have for you, which is diversity and inclusion in corporations. So this question actually came from Joe. And what he was wondering is diversity and inclusion have become buzzwords that companies and

nonprofits recently, a lot of them have not really done the work in the past. And now because of events this year, in particular, they are trying to catch up, and we wondered, how does the IDRC deal with things like this? Or how do you help people know the difference between diversity, inclusion, inclusive design, accessibility, or something as a social happening, like Black Lives Matter or another political movement?

15:36

Jess:

So it's complicated. It's a great question, because it is really complicated. To start with, I'll say a couple of things. One is when we work with other groups, we try to meet them where they are. And this is my message to them, we'll meet you where you are, and we want to help you level up. How much you can level up is going to depend on you. And it's going to depend on how much you're ready for, and that's a really tough thing, to start the conversation or a consultation with the company. That's not generally what they want to hear, right. They want to hear, here are your outcomes, here's what you can expect, and you're going to get this stamp of approval. But you said it yourself Zoya, it's a process. It's not, it's not you know, something that you achieve, and then you check off. And some companies have clearly done so much more than others. That doesn't mean that, you know, we aren't excited and interested to work with the companies who are trying in earnest to do this, what we find, when I say we – what I find is, a lot of the companies that want to do this in earnest, don't actually know what is entailed in doing it. So part of the struggle is changing their expectation of what a consultant would do or what working with us would do. And what we find is that we need to have a number of conversations with them four or five, at least, to understand a couple of things before we begin. And I think that to me is what makes the engagement most meaningful. We need to understand where they are and you can't you can't do that quickly. You have to do that by understanding what are the pain points that you've encountered in the past? And having those tough conversations is you two well know, doesn't just happen overnight, you have to build some trust with people. And so I think the number of conversations we have to have upfront is a couple of things - It's doing the trust building and then it's also what I find is that the people that we're working with will be thinking through it with us at the same time. They aren't sure what they're asking for. We want to be inclusive, we want to be accessible. What does that mean? You know, if you want to be -- it's a spectrum, right. And I created this thing a couple of years ago that tried to visualize this, I don't know how helpful it was, it might have been somewhat divisive, but I called it the wokeness scale. And I meant I meant the wokeness part. And I was using it quite intentionally. And that is to show on the spectrum, that these things are visible from the outside. They're sniffable. We can tell from a company's website, and from a company's activities in the last number of years, how committed they are to inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, and we can tell it pretty quickly actually. So first of all, it's helping people understand that we can sort of see this and not just we can see this, other people can see this. And this has an impact on how welcoming your company or your website or whatever it is you're doing is for people.

The other thing is, you said is some understanding some basic definitions, we take a slightly different approach to what some of those definitions are. But I think it helps with the kind of rethinking of what can happen within the organization. We've had organizations, for instance, that have come to us and said, We want inclusion. And we have a couple of conversations, and then silence and then a year later, they'll come to us and say, we think we know what we

want now. We did some restructuring. We have some new leadership who's really invested in this. We have some support from the bottom up as well. We're ready. And what's interesting about that is that it shows the process that is a process to readiness, it doesn't have a fixed timeline. And there aren't linear steps to jumping through this. But it is difficult, I think, for a company to go from not thinking about this, to thinking about this in all aspects. So not just products, but hiring, procurement. It really is the thread that runs through everything. And so if your organization hasn't thought about it, from, you know, provenance to whatever time you are, then there's some catching up to do and some thinking through how it impacts everything.

I don't know, did I answer the question?

Zoya:

I think so. Yeah.

20:50

Jess:

And then not having done their homework is interesting.

Yeah, because I think it gets back to this wandering business, not having done their homework is, in some ways, looking at the quantitative as the tea leaves, for understanding everything. And you can miss a lot when you do that. And you've got companies who go beyond that, and are committed to the anecdote. But what's interesting to me is when companies have a moment where they stop, and they say, "oh crap, we got this wrong". And they say it transparently, like you saw, National Geographic a few years ago said, "we've been doing race wrong, all this time, we've actually been racist, we've been contributing to racism, we're not going to do that anymore". And that was huge, right?

To have like mech, the co-op in Canada, come out and say, you know, all of our images of people in the outdoors are of able bodied, young white people. That's not who enjoys the outdoors only. They don't have some special sort of claim to the outdoors, we're gonna change that. I think that's so powerful when a company can do that, and can admit we didn't get this right, and we want to improve it. And so what we want to do is work with those companies who are ready to do that. And as I said, it's a spectrum. Like, they're all at different points.

22:28

Tania:

Yeah. I think this leads to our second question we wanted to talk to you about. Talking about this full spectrum of representation in leadership, when it's not there – how can someone navigate this? How does the IDRC work? How do you find the blind spots when conducting these focus groups? And how can you show transparency?

Jess:

I think you're seeing the way you ask the question, how do you find the blind spots? I think the IDRC assumes there are always blind spots, and works to continue to uncover them. When we start from the perspective of thinking we have it complete, or we have it neatly figured out - we miss the opportunities, for the divergent ideas and the corners. And the

corners is where I think the interesting things are happening, the outliers, right? And why the outliers. So I think the perspective is shifted, the expectation is in any situation, we have a blind spot. So the focus is less on completion, and more on engagement, and continual revisiting. Now again, these are not things that companies necessarily like to hear. They like to ship product. But it's not that incompatible with the notion of shipping, a minimum viable product, and then shipping a version one shipping a version two, you can still do all of those things and be, you know, inclusive AF, as I say. You can still do all of those things, and be accessible AF. what you have to do before that is have the culture, have the commitment, have the transparency and have the clarity of what it means to do that and why you're doing it. And so, one way that I've talked to some organizations about this, and this has been true for cultural institutions as well as museums is I can sniff out I think, I like things in threes. I think you two know this about me - everything is a three.

So I came up with this three part way that organizations respond to difficulties in particular around inclusion or to representation. The first is somebody pointed out and they go to HR. And then HR says, this is what the lawyers told us to say, this is how you handle this. And that is not associated with much culture change at all. That is more like covering your bum. The second approach is tokenism. So we don't have a woman of color in a senior leadership position, we better get one. And that is very sniffable. I mean, you can see that very transparently from the outside and it sets somebody up to potentially fail. I've seen people come into leadership positions under those circumstances and it makes for a very strange dynamic. It's not also necessarily associated with culture change. Now you've got, you know, one face that stands out in the crowd of the picture, but it's very obvious that that's one face. The third is, is when I think organizations make a commitment to diversity and inclusion. And then you see the change in the hiring practices, you see the change in the way the job descriptions are written, and you can see the commitment to this work as a result of those things. And I think this goes back to that opportunity begets opportunity, these organizations will take chances on people who haven't necessarily had that, this, this long train of opportunities that are built on each other, they look for the for the people who maybe didn't have the opportunity and then want to give them an opportunity. And I think that that is a much more organic, not tokenistic way of approaching this. And I think that that is the one that's associated most deeply with culture change. And I like to see that in all aspects in the hiring and the job description in the onboarding.

At OCAD we've got Dori Tunstall, the first African American woman, Dean of an art school. She's a Dean of the Faculty of Design, and she has been talking about the cluster hiring that she did at OCAD. And she makes a really, really wonderful point, they did a cluster hiring for people of color. And what they did is they hired people on different levels within the organization. So you don't have all of your people of color junior faculty, and have some people in a position where they can make decisions that will support junior faculty, some people in positions of power and you hire them as a cluster, they can support each other or, you know, just the fact that they are a cluster, in and of itself changes the dynamic of the institution when they come in together. I think that that's kind of a really interesting model.

28:16

And it tackles a lot of different things, because it's not just addressing changing the color of the picture, like the tokenistic approach, it's changing power, changin decision making, change who is, you know, determining what the future is going to be?

28:36

Zoya:

I didn't know that they had done it that way, but that actually makes a lot of sense. I need to look further into that.

28:43

Jess:

Isn't it though?! It's one of those things where you're like, well, that does make so much sense. Why has it not happened before? Yeah.

28:51

Zoya:

And it's kind of simple. It's a simple solution but makes a lot of sense.

Zoya:

The third topic that I wanted to ask you about was accessible home work and home life. So this year has changed everything about the way we work, and the internet is proving critical for us to survive and keep working and doing what we have to do, but BC - which is "before COVID" - accessibility needs weren't really at the forefront for a lot of companies, but now they are. And I was wondering how do you communicate the value of digital inclusion to companies? And where do you see this going? We're still in COVID, but we're going into post-COVID eventually, so what do you see there?

29:52

Jess:

I mean, it was really fascinating when companies started tripping over themselves to encourage work from home and to say, you can work from home for the rest of your career. Then on Twitter, especially where there are some very vocal, very good, I think, representation of people with disabilities, people are saying, wait a minute, like, you told me I couldn't work from home and that was the reason you couldn't hire me or I couldn't work in this circumstance. I think that what COVID did in a really interesting way is it forced us to think about what really was essential. And to be honest, we got it wrong a lot. And for arbitrary reasons. This is what's so exciting, because you get an opportunity. It's been brutal, and it's an opportunity for us to do things differently. Why on earth do we need to have brick and mortar for a lot of our organizations? It's costly. And I'm not denying that there are things that are missing in face to face interactions.

But I'm not sure have we ever been face to face? The three of us?

31:09

Tania:

No, I was online. Yeah, Tania did the program from Mexico. So we were partially face to face.

Jess:

But like, I heard somebody say it's difficult to build trust online, I don't actually find that that's the case.

31:30

Tania:

Yeah like with my advisor, I never met her. I have never met Dr. Michelle Wyndham-West. I was supposed to go to Canada to meet her and get my diploma. And that's something I want to do one day, but I feel like I have [met her].

31:49

Jess:

I mean, I think that your mileage will vary and there are certainly some aspects to the online that are a little bit clunky. But I haven't found that you can't build trust online, and you can't build strong communities and you can't build strong connections. I think we told ourselves these things. And I don't think they were right. I think that organizations made arbitrary rules about people needing to show up and do this, and it's part of our culture - you know? I worry about organizations that say anything, absolutely, about where the work can happen. If I'm more comfortable here, and I can sort of be more comfortable in my own space, and that helps me do more work then why isn't that an option? There are some people who really miss their colleagues and miss being, you know, elbow to elbow. I think that's that's an option too, but whenever we have some fixed idea of how things should happen, I think we should ask ourselves why and does this even make sense anymore? And "anymore" is maybe the "BC" as you're saying, "before COVID" and then the post-COVID. What I hope doesn't happen is that everybody gets vaccinated, and they decide that what was BC is normal and we should go back to that. I think there are a lot of things that were wrong with that impact on the planet, the impact on families, the separation and the pressure of work life and home life. I think that the push to really consider what is essential as an opportunity, and I hope people don't go back to something they thought was normal because it was crazy.

33:46

Zoya:

I agree. I totally agree. I actually really like working from home. The introvert in me is like I'm good.

33:56

Jess:

That's what they said that COVID was sort of the introvert's dream because they stay home not be, you know, socially active. So you know, and then they and then I saw these little memes and said the dogs were really the winners of COVID and I'll tell you that there's something like too much time with the dogs because now anytime we leave the dogs panic, they're just so used to having us here all the time. There's something like too much.

34:30

Tania:

I think my cats want me to leave.

34:34

Jess:

See this difference between dogs and cats? Right?

34:39

Tania:

Like why are you not dressing up? Why aren't you going? Like I want your bed.

34:52

Jess:

Yeah. [laughter]

34:54

Tania:

And also I think kids - like in my experience, I think it's been nice to spend more time with my daughter. And it's been like something many, many clients didn't know I was a mother. And not that that I wanted them to know. Nothing. But many got surprised when in the camera, I had to pick up my daughter and they were like, "who's that?" And I'm like, I have a daughter. And they were like "what, you?" And I think it made them realize many, many, many things they didn't know, I had a daughter. And that was weird for them to find out like, and "are you married? Or what? Like, what? Who are you?"

35:35

Jess:

Who are you?! [laughter] You're not just a professional, you know, sort of shell.

You have a family?

35:41

Tania:

For many, it was weird like oh okay.

And I was like, yes, I do have a life.

35:49

Jess:

It's been very humanizing. I mean, I've been on conference calls where people's partners, their children, their animals walk behind them. You know, it's not so easy to think of you as just this shell of a professional person, you are in a context. And now with COVID, we are squarely in that context with you when we're online together. And I can see your home, you can see my home. And if I don't close my door properly, my dog charges in the middle of meetings and sits on the couch, which he knows he's not supposed to do. So these are just the humanizing moments. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think it's important to remember that we are people with contexts and families and constraints. And you know, some people are caring for elderly parents, some people, you know, are just doing extra work during COVID. It's really tough on parents to have children who are going to school remotely and don't know how to use technology. I heard one parent say that their little one said, "how come the keyboard isn't in alphabetical order?" I just learned the alphabet. And I mean spot on. Like, where did this querty thing come from?

37:13

Tania:

That is a good point. I can relate that homeschooling has been hard.

37:20

Zoya:

So our last question. I don't know if Tania was asked about it because it was hers.

37:26

Tania:

Yeah, I've been thinking about this and when we read your blogs and your writing and when hearing you teach us, I always thought like you seem like a person with a lot of courage. And that's something that I wanted to ask because I think we need it. And it's been like a tough year. And people have had to face a lot of hard truths. And in your type of work. What does it mean to be both vulnerable and have to be courageous? Like, when do you have to be that and it's hard?

38:08

Jess:

Well, first of all, thank you both for reading anything I've written at all, it always amazes me. But it's so lovely, and please tell me, give me feedback and give me criticism and critique and add to it and all of those things.

38:26

Tania:

This question came especially from your blog, when you were talking about what it meant to become an inclusive designer, and how to let go of everything else. How sometimes it's hard to do that. And now that you think differently than I think -- that happened to a lot of us that graduated, and I liked that writing a lot.

38:48

Jess:

I tried to put that together and Tania, because I realized that when we would go and talk to an organization, they wouldn't know what to expect, like I said earlier, they would have some conversations, but they wouldn't know what it would feel like or what it might do to them to have this kind of training or this shift in perspective. I mean, you say to somebody, I'm going to shift your perspective, I'm not sure what that means. And I'm not sure I'm very comfortable with that hands off my perspective. And I mean, there are a lot of, you know, forces that push you back into the ruts of the way you're doing things. Maybe it's interesting, not just how did I become just at the IDRC, but how did I even get to the point of writing those things? And it was, I got so disgusted with myself. I couldn't write. I was having a lot of trouble putting things out there. And I didn't understand why I had some thoughts. I had some ideas but I hadn't found my voice and it was really frustrating for me.

And I totally believe that sometimes there are journeys that you have to just be on, and then it comes to fruition at some future point, and it's not necessarily something you can always determine. I finally got disgusted with not being able to write things and put them out there publicly. And so I just started doing it. And I was terrified. I mean, we're squarely in the time

of social media, cancel culture, call out culture, all of these things, and each one of us gets something wrong at some point in our lives, we are human, we are fallible. We're not always going to say the right thing or say what we're thinking in a way that is necessarily super articulate, sometimes we say it wrong first, and then need to work through it, and I worry that people don't have the space to do that. I think the courageous thing is an interesting one, because I don't think of myself as courageous. I think of myself maybe even a little bit as reckless.

I firmly believe though, that if I can be as -- it goes back to humanizing -- if I can be as real with people as I can be, then then it gives them some space to be real with me as well.

The thing that I always want to be tuned into is power and what you do with power. It's very hard for me, and I don't know, I think this is true for many other people as well. I don't always know how I'm being received. And so if I put something out there, and I don't know, if you all have felt this way, as well, you write something that's about some idea you have, and you put it out there, and you don't know how other people read it, or what they think of it. And so few people actually tell you what they think of it, except when you get to the point of call culture, where you'll get destroyed and vilified. And so it's hard to know how you're landing. But what I want to always do is feel uncomfortable, because in that discomfort, I feel like I'm always asking what's missing? I feel like I'm always, you know, looking for those blind spots that I have. And I feel like I'm trying to make sure that I'm somebody if I have even an inkling, or a little piece of power that I will stand up when it is the right time to stand up or when it needs to be done. It worries me that more people who have power are not standing up and saying, look this just isn't right. This isn't the way that we should treat each other. This isn't ethical. You have to think about this, and you have to do better than this. And so I guess there's a piece of me, that feels as though I'm not ever courageous enough, and I want to be more courageous. And part of the way that I've tried to do that is by writing and saying some things that I know, don't necessarily, I think they don't necessarily land for some people, but they land for others. But I think that this is the discomfort I wish everybody would embrace in their life, because what I found is that if I maintain this discomfort, then I can still have personal growth. And I know it's strange to sort of think of them together, but I don't want to be complacent. I don't want to stop seeing the opportunities that we have to make things better. I don't know if I answered your question.

44:11

Zoya:

You did.

Um, can I ask one more just that just popped into my mind? I think I asked Jutta this as well.

I think a lot of people, they have the right intention, and they want to do inclusion, but they don't necessarily know how to do it. And I think what I asked Jutta was like in your opinion and your expertise, what is like one thing that people can adopt, a thought or belief or whatever, that can just start to help them move in the right direction?

44:49

Jess:

That's a great question.

The first thing I think I would say to them is that none of us is an expert in this I feel very uncomfortable, the notion of having any expertise in this. What I have is the opportunity to practice this a lot. We're all practitioners, right? And again, my sailboat took me to a place where I get to practice a lot. The one thing that I think -- can I have two things?

Zoya:

Yes, of course.

Jess:

I think that curiosity is a prerequisite for doing some of this. Sometimes we hear that you need to build empathy. I think curiosity comes before empathy. To be curious about how somebody else experiences something, or how they experience your writing, for example, and to wonder what they think about your thoughts. You have to be open and you have to be curious. And it doesn't mean open to all things because that can be quite dangerous. But it does mean curious, curious about things like why can't we work at home? You know, why can't we work across time zones? Why can't the technology enable us to do this synchronously and asynchronously? Why are we putting these boundaries up and these barriers up? Does it make sense? And then revisit it. Does it still make sense? Does it still not make sense? Have we done anything about it? I think for me, curiosity, and that's that piece Zoya that you're saying that had you sort of followed your curiosity, you're not sure that you would have taken the path that you took - I think that we need to build in more curiosity.

46:43

Zoya

I like that. I agree with that.

46:47

Jess:

Your questions are so thoughtful, and so nicely put together and they followed so nicely. Thank you for this opportunity. It's really lovely.

Zoya:

Thank you for being here with us!

47:04

Zoya

So that was our conversation with Jess. I hope that you enjoyed that as much as we did, and that you learned something and you're able to apply it to your own life in your own way of thinking around inclusion and diversity and such topics. If you would like to connect with Jess, or if you would like to dive into her writing, which we discussed in this episode, you can find her on Twitter, as well as medium @jesshmitchell. The link will be in the description of this episode, and if you would like to find out more about myself or Tania or the entire Manifold team, and what we're up to with these conversations and our projects - you can find out more about us at hellomanifold.com