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Monica Trinidad:

You're listening to the Lit Review podcast. I'm one of your hosts, Monica Trinidad, and today we're talking with a New Yorker!

Monica Trinidad:

Today we're talking with Heena Sharma, a queer South Asian organizer with the New York chapter of Survived & Punished. And Survived and Punished is an organization that focuses on prison abolition and supporting criminalized survivors of gender violence. And as you can already tell from our last few episodes, we've been branching outside of Chicago with our guests this season, just a little bit, but we're gonna bring it back to home base when we close out this season.

And actually, before we get into what we loved about this conversation and talking about the book that Heena chose, Survived and Punished is very much rooted in Chicago. Love & Protect is one of the affiliate groups of Survived and Punished New York and one of the founding groups of Survived and Punished National, back when it was still called the Chicago Alliance to Free Marissa Alexander. Page and I supported that together in various ways, Marissa Alexander is free and is doing well. Shoutout to Mariame Kaba for all of her foundational work in just propelling so many of these efforts and for letting Page and I support! And it feels like a lifetime ago, but it really brings me so much joy to just see how this work has continued and evolved! Yeah! Page, how are you doing? Good to see you.

Page May:

Good to see you as well, as always! And I'm doing okay, just getting to revisit these conversations—I appreciate this, I'm glad that you all are listening, and! I selfishly love this

process of just having these initial conversations and then getting to revisit them in such an intentional way. To do something as simple as get an intro ready, I like coming back to these ideas. But yeah, so I'm doing great and really grateful and it's good to see your face, as always.

Monica Trinidad:

Yeah, so let's talk about this really incredible conversation with Heena. Heena chose to talk about the book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. And it's one of those books that I have on or near my desk at all times, actually it's right in front of me right now. And if you find yourself still struggling with understanding how disability justice intersects in your life, or if you're like me and you're still grappling with acknowledging your own disabilities, or if you're looking to just get a really quick run down on disability justice lineages and principles, this book is for you, and this conversation is for you.

Monica Trinidad:

There's these principles of disability justice that we can look to for guidance, but also we just really emphasized how disability justice and access are a constant process, there's never "You've reached access. Checkmark. Here we go. We've done it." And I think that speaks to me, how much abolition is an experiment, abolition is figuring out these, what are our next steps? What kind of world do we want? And as much as we want to see the ends of things, like prisons, and policing, and war, I think we also, you know, especially artists and cultural workers and organizers, we also have to envision what we want the world to be and to look like, and we won't have this one solid answer, right? It's going to look different for so many different people and so many different communities, and disability justice really informs how we move forward in that work. So, I really loved this conversation. What did you think of our conversation, Page?

Page May:

Yes, yes, to all of that that you just shared. And I think, I mean you, I think shared all of the jewels, right, of what Heena had to share in this conversation with what this book is offering. It is probably the number one book that I have of all the books I haven't read from the Lit Review that we've talked about, and I say this everytime, I gotta get, I gotta get this book.

Page May:

Also if you're new to this podcast and you hear that it's a podcast about books, it's a great example of how yes, and! It's not necessarily dissecting and doing this deep, literary analysis by any stretch, it's really about the person that we're talking to, and using the book as a way to talk about a moment in their life when they picked it up and how it changed them after, right. And whether or not that is actually what the author intended is the question mark, and that's fine. I think this was just the perfect conversation with this person that I've never met, but it was so charming! Like Heena is amazing, and all the things that you shared earlier Monica about the

things that we talked about are there, yeah, definitely please please please listen to this one all the way through.

Page May:

I think one of my favorite parts that really touched me and I will continue to think about that moment for a long time, was Heena at the very beginning when introducing herself was like um, “I think I was starting to think of myself as a disabled person, I’m someone with chronic mental illness, I think that was a whole journey, and is still a journey. Like, am I disabled enough? Am I sick? Whatever those things mean...” and kind of cutting herself off and then she said “is not being able to get out of bed because I’m depressed and I wouldn’t say that to anyone else, right?” and at that moment, I’m not sure if folks were able to follow that but it was this moment where Heena is showing and talking about the differences of how we navigate it for ourselves and others and the expectations we put on ourselves and like, unnecessary ‘you’re not disabled enough’ with air quotes, right? And that’s just something I think about with myself, right, and just all the ways that I tell myself I’m not “enough” to participate in something, or to think about something, or to need something, or to say that I have a need and so that moment of just how human and raw and real that was, I think is a good example of this conversation.

Monica Trinidad:

Thank you for sharing all of that, Page, and before we dive into the episode I wanted to just briefly bring some of the names into the room, some of the disability justice organizers and elders and folks who have really shaped this work in so many ways, I know Leah names Stacy Milburn, rest in power, Leah names Leroy Moore, Cyree Jarelle Johnson, Patty Berne, Aurora Levins Morales, Elliot Fukui, Mia Mingus, Kai Cheng Thom, there’s so many names in here and I really encourage everybody to get this book if you haven’t picked it up already. And so with that, I want to introduce you to our conversation with Heena Sharma on *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Laksmi Piepzna-Samarasinha.

[INTRO STARTS]

[Sound of book pages turning, soft instrumental music]

Monica: You're listening to the Lit Review Podcast.

Page: We're your hosts, Page May and Monica Trinidad.

[Musical hip hop beat playing in background from “Chicago” by David Ellis]

Mariame Kaba voiceover: *"I think it's essential for people to learn together in order to be able to understand what we're up against."*

Protesters Chanting: *"CPD, shut it down! New Jim Crow, shut it down!" [chanting] "I said No Cop Academy, 95 mil for community!"*

Page voiceover: *"We must disrupt, we must disobey, we must agitate, we must escalate, we must break, we must create, we must abolish, we must transform -"*

Young person voiceover: *"I remember, she was shot by my house -"*

Mariame voiceover: *"In sharing our ideas, we're stronger."*

[Music Lyrics] *"Welcome to Chicago, this is home for most. This is the home of the wealthy, making cameos. This is the house of the heartless, the home of the cold. Man, my dog gets more acknowledgement than homeless folks. This is a house, a generation filled in Audy homes..."*

[Music Fades]

[INTRO ENDS]

Monica Trinidad:

We're so excited to be here with Heena Sharm, an organizer with the New York chapter of Survived & Punished to talk about the book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. How are you doing, Heena?

Heena Sharma::

I'm great. I'm excited here. I'm so glad that the universe is finally letting us have this conversation. Something about today is meant to be.

Monica Trinidad:

Exactly. So, Heena, can you tell us a little bit about who you are, what do you do, and why do you do it?

Heena Sharma:

Sure. I am a facilitator, educator, organizer, although I have more and more qualms, confusion about what organizer means these days, especially because I feel like it's another term that's just used all the time. And I've been doing work with Survived & Punished New York for a few years. And prior to that, I did work with the Audre Lorde Project in New York, a QTPOC organizing space. That was a space where I first learned about disability justice, healing justice. But my knowledge and experience of that has shifted over the years. And why do I do this stuff? I wonder that every day as I sign up for things, try to make a When2Meet, I'm like "What is the point of any of this?"

Heena Sharma:

I feel like I first just started doing more political youth work in college and shortly after college. I'm a South Asian queer person who grew up in Staten Island, which is like a wild ride in itself. That could be its own podcast episode. You know and just thinking about the systems of immigration, how it affected my family and... yeah! And then as I grew more politicized and radicalized about even noticing things that I had grown up with that started to have language... For instance, psych incarceration and policing has been part of my family experience.

Heena Sharma:

And I was primarily drawn to working with young people and youth. And I know it's something that you all are familiar with, because I don't believe in paternalism and you know, this kind of passing down of knowledge as though there's experts from adults or something. And I also have seen how much youth are just treated that way or they're expected to be the saviors of everybody, by themselves alone. We see that with climate change discourse a lot. So, I think that's kind of the stuff that's been on my mind and drove me to do more and more political things. And as I became more confident and comfortable with my different identities, wanting to engage more in queer organizing, QTPOC organizing, seeing how Black folks, brown folks are specifically targeted for all kinds of different incarceration and how much mental health and healing is not part of that conversation.

Heena Sharma:

Even if people understand police violence, violence in prisons, there's not as much of a focus on like "Okay, what do you do if you do survive that? What does survival mean really?" And obviously so many people do not even survive just those experiences, but how could we actually build nourishing and rejuvenating communities for people? That was kind of a lot of different things. I'm an Aquarius. So I'm kind of like... So if I go a little off the walls, please feel free to bring me back.

Page May:

I was right there with you. I love it. Thank you. It's always so interesting to hear sort of why people do what they do. And I think it's fair to say a pretty consistent theme is it's not a simple reason, I mean, that it is because we love people, right, and we love ourselves as we want us to survive. But I really, really appreciated hearing that, what you were saying about your work with young people and just that... Thank you for your story. I thought that was really interesting. And I'm wondering... The book that we're going to be talking about today is actually *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*. And this came out in 2018, and so not too long ago. So can you tell us more about the story of what led you to read it? What was going on for you? What were you up to at that time?

Heena Sharma:

Sure. I think as I was starting to think of myself as a disabled person, I'm someone with chronic mental illness, I think, that was a whole journey from... And it's still a journey. Like a lot of "Am I disabled enough? Am I sick?" Whatever these things mean or... Is not being able to get out of bed because I'm depressed... And I wouldn't say that to anyone else. Right? It's specific standards just for myself, which are impossible to achieve. But I think as I was starting to really think of how my experience is connected to other political struggles and organizing and how so many people have that... And it's also so varied.

Heena Sharma:

I think as also my being in community with disabled folks, also, as that grew, I think I just really wanted to read this book. I was very excited about it. I also had followed Leah Lakshmi's writing for years. I remember seeing them read once at the Asian American Writers Workshop in New York.

Heena Sharma:

But I had been a fan of Leah Lakshmi's work for a while. I read her memoir *Dirty River*. I don't know if you all are familiar with it, but that was my first time reading an account of someone who's grappling with being a queer South Asian survivor and specifically survivor of incest, right, which is particularly never spoken about and who doesn't believe in prison, is an abolitionist, and just sharing her journey, and also really framing her family and her experiences with a lot of humanity, right. It wasn't even, she knew that she had value and that's what she was striving for, but also wasn't trying to discount the different kinds of systemic violence her family has experienced over the generations. So, that also made a huge impact on me. And so, it was like "Okay. So now going to disability justice. I really want to learn more." And then I revisited the book when the pandemic started. I shouldn't be laughing. I don't know why I'm laughing.

Page May:

To not cry.

Monica Trinidad:

Laughing to not cry. Exactly.

Heena Sharma:

Right. Yeah, just thinking about what it means to be living in the time of these mass disabling events. And "events" is even not even the right word, but just thinking about so much internalized ableism that folks have, and long-COVID. It just feels there's so many connections and such a need for people to dive more into disability justice and not kind of whitewashed, liberal version of it, but the more radical roots of it.

Monica Trinidad:

Absolutely. And something that also is parallel for this podcast and this book is that this book was written as a tool for surviving under Trump. Right? And that was the same reason why we started this podcast. It came out of an organizing strategy of particularly... How do we continue to do political education with everybody as we are in the streets and as we are organizing on all fronts? And so, I liked that parallel of this book and this podcast. And this book is just such a necessary intervention, I think, and, for many of the things you just named, Heena. And, I mean, this book is like a manifesto. It's broken up into essays. And so, you can pick it up and put it down all the time, which is something that I'm always doing with it. And it really was—Leah is emphasizing how sick and disabled people, how queer and trans and Black and brown people were sounding these alarms and sharing their knowledge of how do you survive fascism? How do you survive ableism? How do you survive climate chaos? And when I picked up this book, again, also at the beginning of the pandemic, I was just seeing the ways that history is repeating itself with not listening to disabled organizers and not hearing the ways that they know how to survive all of these things because they do it every day.

Monica Trinidad:

And now, we're facing this pandemic. A lot of able-bodied people are like "What do we do? How do we—masks. What?" And they're like "KN95." It was just so, I'm just very thankful for this book. And I'm really thankful that we're talking about care more now. We're talking about collective access more now. We're talking about crip lineages and crip futures. And I think, so, I'm just thinking a lot about, how, I mean, one, where all of us are at right now, right?

Monica Trinidad:

Heena, you're in bed right now recording this episode. I'm at my desk. Page is at the foot of her bed recording this episode. And we're all in different places, right. Page is on the opposite end of the city from where I am, and Heena you're in New York. And then we're here virtually managing all of this tech and making this conversation happen. And I feel like that is the foundation of how we can show up in the capacity that works for us. And so, all of that to say, can you talk to us about why you chose this book in particular to talk about today?

Heena Sharma:

Thank you for that. I'm thinking so much about what you just shared and even.... I'm just really sitting with it. I'm sorry. But the thing that you mentioned about us being in our beds and all these things and just even the framework of how to think about things, what you were mentioning about what disabled folks had to offer when the pandemic started. Even the idea of community care and like "Oh, what are the needs of the most vulnerable people?" That matters.

Heena Sharma:

So I just wanted to add that. But why I wanted to use this particular book, like I shared, because I had already been following Leah's work and also just the idea... This book itself is a compilation,

like you mentioned, of essays that they've written in the past, new essays, interviews... And just the fact that even the book itself is kind of modeling how we can share knowledge with each other... And Leah talks about in the beginning of the book how she spent so much time writing this book on her phone, on buses, in her bed...All these things and that she really was like "I'm not going to be able to speak in an academic theoretical kind of way. This is just what my experiences are and I want to be accessible with my language." And I know that's the structure of you all's podcast as well, right, and something I think about a lot too.

Heena Sharma:

So I just really appreciated how it's not theory-heavy. And even the way that she talks about it... In the very beginning, she's like "I'm not the sole voice on this. I've learned a lot from other people." The fact that she cites the lineages that have come before her and how much impact she's had from other people, and that she's aware of her privilege, right, in being able to get this published with this publisher and she's like, she wants there to be more and more people to be able to share things, right. So I just really appreciated her naming those things and just the fact that she even frames the book that way. So I just was like "Oh, I really want to explore this book." And the fact that she also highlights femmes of color, queer femmes of color and their contributions have been to our movements and how much they're vulnerable. Right. So I think that particular frame, not everyone talks about that. And so, I just really appreciate it, wanting to talk about it with you all.

Page May:

Yeah. And I think I'm the odd one out of... I haven't read this book. And so, I'm piecing this together, which is great, because it's nice having one person here who hasn't heard it because then I'll have lots of questions. And so, I have sort of the big question of just, okay, so what's it about? But to add more to it, what I've pieced together so far is it sounds like it's a book that is part intervention, part manifesto, part memoir, and maybe part how-to guide. And it's a collection of essays, which sometimes makes it hard to summarize because I don't know if there's very different themes throughout. So, I'm curious. Some immediate questions I have within that, what is this book about? What's Leah's story? What's her journey, or their journey? And then, what are they trying to share? What are the gems from this?

Heena Sharma:

Ah, very important questions.

Page May:

This is what takes us anywhere from 30 minutes to the rest of your life to answer. So, go for it.

Heena Sharma:

Yeah. I mean, I think you're right that it is hard to kind of concisely summarize this book, but I think she starts off with kind of sharing a little bit about her story. And she's from Toronto and in her journey to moving to Oakland, which is where she really was... I mean, she was in disabled queer community in Toronto as well. But I think in Oakland, it was just a next phase of her life, especially because Toronto was the site of a lot of violence in her past and all these things. So she kind of shares that, but then she really just starts to talk about the Disability Justice Collective in 2005 that was formed.

Heena Sharma:

And they were the folks who coined disability justice as a term, right. So this is Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Leroy Moore, Eli Clare, Sebastian Margaret. And they're all disabled, queer, trans, Black, Asian, and maybe a few white activists and artists. And their connection is with Sins Invalid, which is still in existence and flourishing, which is the disability and justice performance collective that was also co-created by Patty Berne and Leroy Moore. And I just love that she even just names all these folks because she's like "I want people to know who came up with these ideas." Right. Obviously these ideas have been around, but who coined the terms, really trying to acknowledge how easy it is to co-opt different concepts, especially from QTBIPOC folks. And so, just really wanting to honor that. And she includes the 10 principles of DJ. Would it be helpful for me to go over them?

Page May:

Yes, please.

Heena Sharma:

So, this is an off-cited thing from Sins Invalid, which, Page, I encourage you to check out. Maybe you already know it. Like, "No-

Page May:

Tell me all the things. I'm here to learn.

Heena Sharma:

So these are kind of the main principles of DJ. Part of the whole idea is also that these things are fluid. They're co-created. Things are changing. People are adding things all the time. But the 10 principles are... So one is intersectionality, interlocking systems of oppression, leadership of the most impacted... So really not being led by abled people, right? And even within disabled communities, right, there's all kinds of different power dynamics and hierarchies based on what kind of disability people have. Obviously, if you're Black and disabled, it's different and you're more vulnerable to the police, all these kinds of things. So, just thinking about that... Then the next one is anti-capitalist, so just how ableism is so intrinsically connected to labor, white supremacy logics. "How can we extract these things from folks", right? and what does it mean if

you're disabled and you can't really be quote unquote "productive" in certain ways? And so, how you can't be about disability justice if you're like "Yeah. Corporations are people." What is that?

Heena Sharma:

The next one is sustainability, right. So really thinking about how we are engaging in spaces that won't burn us out? that won't leave people out? That can be continuing, can be caring, nourishing? And I think sometimes people say sustainability a lot without really thinking about, "Okay, who is not in your space right now?" Thinking about who's not even considered "valuable enough" to be part of that conversation, right. And there's commitment to cross disability solidarity, right, so solidarity between folks with mental, physical... And this is stuff, again, that I like just to affirm, assert whatever, one of those words. I am very much a beginner of this work, and I was nervous to come on because I'm not an expert on this. People shouldn't think of me as an expert. So, I'm just here sharing what I can. But there's a lot to be said about what cross-disability solidarity can look like and what are the barriers, right, which is very tied with what people consider like the internalized ableism, that's like "Oh, this is worse than others or this is visible and not visible," like all these kinds of things, right, especially as they interplay with race and class and gender.

Page May:

I want to hear the rest of the list, but that's been... As we've been talking, I've been thinking just sort of... The word choice... Able to do what? Who defines that? and under what conditions, right? And I do think it means something very specific. That's not to say that everyone has a... I'm not suggesting or trying to say that, but just... All of these things are constructs, right? They're real, but they're also not because of the way that we have built the world. And how beautiful would it be if we built a world that everyone was able to do the things that they needed? We'd have so many more cool things going on. So anyways, yes, go for it. Continue. I think you were on number six or... I don't know.

Heena Sharma:

Yeah, so the next one is collective access. So, again, what we kind of were talking about earlier, what are the needs of all of our folks? How can it also be considered acts of love and care, which I think is also a Mia Mingus framing, not as a burden or all these things. But, actually, when all of our people can feel like they are valued, regardless of what they can produce, what kind of world would that be like, what you were saying, Page. And then the last one is collective liberation. So, thinking about... I know there's a lot of work that folks have been doing with Black disabled folks who are incarcerated, right? Different people—psych incarceration, how often that's not included in prison abolition kind of conversations, but how important that is too. Right. And that is so ingrained. Right? if someone mentions someone has schizophrenia or bipolar or is violent with the mental illness... We see people getting killed by police. We see people getting institutionalized. And so, really, this is not just... This is everywhere, right? We

have to just think about disability justice and all of the kinds of organizing and movement work people are doing. It's not its own kind of thing. It has to be deeply enmeshed in everything because ableism is present everywhere.

Monica Trinidad:

That's right.

Heena Sharma:

That was the 10.

Monica Trinidad:

I think that was only... Was that seven? I counted seven. I was following along. I think we skipped two. Cross movement solidarity-

Page May:

We did that one.

Monica Trinidad:

Recognizing wholeness-

Heena Sharma:

I skipped the recognizing wholeness. We don't want to recognize wholeness?

Page May:

Who needs it? I prefer pieces. [laughs]

Heena Sharma:

Yeah. Recognizing wholeness...yeah! The idea that people are not just their disability, not just what they can offer, that they're whole, that they're messy. They're not going to be some magical kind of savior. They're not someone who just has all this wisdom, but can't be wrong. Really the idea of not treating people as symbols in any kind of way, but how can we just see people as humans?

Page May:

I'm glad that was said.

Heena Sharma:

Yes. It's a good one.

Page May:

Yes. But the way you said that... you all that are listening, let's write that one down. Quote that.

Monica Trinidad:

Yes. If you're writing it down, recognizing wholeness. And I think that leads into my next question that I have for you. One of my favorite essays—and I would love to hear what one of your favorite essays is as well, but one of my favorite essays is the... for folks that have the book and are following along during this episode, it's in the chapter on Crippling the Apocalypse. And the section is on the Crip Art of Failure. And I think that chapter, for me, really has shaped how I move through my organizing work now, because what Leah is sharing, right, is how, “recently, in this chapter, recently on a conference call, a totally well-meaning able bodied person asked me, "We just have one question.

Monica Trinidad:

What is disability justice? How do we do it?" And the answer that Leah had was so encompassing of how I feel like I've moved in organizing spaces but have felt I wasn't doing it right or I wasn't good enough because she says, "You won't meet your benchmarks. People will be really slow. People will be late. People are going to be sick. It looks like what able-bodied people see as failure." And that, for me, it really informed like "Wow. I am not a failure, but I've seen myself as a failure in this work a lot," because even when it comes to this podcast, right, it's been a year since our last season. And that's because we moved slow. And that's because we were really going through it in different parts of our lives. And we're doing it at a pace that works for us.

Monica Trinidad:

And if that doesn't work for other people, and if other people see that as that "Oh, they're not a good podcast because they're not releasing an episode every week, then fuck that, then that's not the work I want to do. That is not how I want us to move in this world because that's not sustainable. And if we're moving at an unsustainable pace, then what are we even doing? How are we even creating and building a world that is for all people if the ways that we're doing it are not for all people. So, just wanted to say that was my favorite part of this book. And would love to hear your thoughts on it. And yeah, I would just love to hear your thoughts on it. I'll stop there.

Heena Sharma:

Yeah. No, thank you for bringing that chapter up. It's so good. It's so good. I'm thinking about, too... There's just no cookie cutter. There's no shortcut to disability justice. I think that's what Leah is really just emphasizing, that it's about building relationships over time. It's about not being perfect, letting go of perfectionism, which we know is a white supremacist thing anyway in which I struggle with myself. But it's hard. And I think about... Because of my work with young people and I'm an educator and I'm sure, Page, teachers can all... When you're working

with students, you can't have some kind of fits-all type model for how you're going to work with folks. With students, it's always individualized attention and models based on how they can learn and not forcing them to fit into preconceived, common core-type bullshit.

Heena Sharma:

And I think about this too, and I think... I was just seeing, in that same chapter, how she's also saying it's too messy and wild to fit into nonprofit, industrial complex structures. Right. And just really naming that and how... It's not going to be easy to fit into your work plan or whatever or even just those frames that are missing the point. I think about land acknowledgements, right, and the kind of just lip service people pay to be like "Okay. I did this thing. I asked what access needs... I asked if there's wheelchair accessibility. I did the thing. I'm good now." And people don't go deeper because they're "Oh, I don't have to because if I'm just appearing to be in a certain way and getting clout and attention for that, then I don't have to go deeper." But it's like if you're actually wanting to shift the conditions that folks are living in, shift your organizing spaces, all these things, it's going to be much more difficult than that, right. It involves relationship building, community efforts, slow and messy things, and people trying stuff. I think about, I think it's Interrupting Criminalization that has the One Million Experiments thing that maybe folks are familiar with. People can submit their projects and collectives to that, where it's keeping track of just different experiments people are doing to build abolitionist structures, spaces, care work, all these kinds of things.

Heena Sharma:

And there's no how-to guide that's like "Okay, I did it." I think even the 10 principles, it's not like the 10 commandments. It's like things that are not etched in stone. It's stuff that is going to be evolving. A Black disabled organizer and attorney TL Lewis... They, I think have been coming up with evolved definitions of ableism. Right. They're focused on even Black disabled communities. These things currently happening, right. Disabled folks are building on these definitions and all these things. So then of course, how can you have some kind of model that fits every situation. So I just really appreciate it too. And I hear you Monica, it's hard to— It's so ingrained to like... What does it mean to be successful? What does it mean to be worthy of something? Right. I think the other thing too, it's a lot of internal work, right. I have to do a lot of internal work, but I'm still doing.... Because it's going to show up in community spaces. Right?

Heena Sharma:

If we are not getting how something we're expecting is ableist of ourselves, we're going to be expecting it in other spaces. Right. We're not going to see things as harmful or even perpetuating other kinds of dynamics, you know.

Page May:

Yeah. That was so full of goodness. You struck a chord in me really deeply when you were talking about students and working with young people and just thinking about how—there's this expectation of like "This is what..." It's literally like it's listed. I haven't been teaching that long. I'm sure experienced teachers out here are like "No, you can do it." By the way, that is impossible, to do all of that in one year for every single student. See, especially after the last... And then on top of that, so you've got this sort of "this is what success looks like" combined with the reality in the classroom of trying to... A lot of us are there because we love young people and we do this out of love and we don't want anyone to fail. And you're trying to work with folks sort of where they're at. And where they're at right now might not be in the classroom.

Page May:

They might've been gone for three weeks. They might be here physically, but definitely not mentally. And then you've got a range of these different abilities with whatever subject... And that it's hard. And there's a joy in the challenge of how do we make this work and a shift that I've been making of... I can't do this alone. What do we do? Getting feedback, having them help. And I think that there's these sites that are... I think schools are a huge source of so much ableism, and there's a site of so much creativity and inspiration and hope. And I'm seeing that every day. And it's really beautiful. And I guess, that's hard for me. I struggle with... I'm someone who likes there to be a simple answer. I like to know what—I want to do it. Math was my favorite subject. And now I'm like "Oh, I read all the things." But that ableism has this sort of... It's synonymous with homogeneity, right?

Page May:

If it worked over here, it should work over here. And if it doesn't work over here, there's something wrong with over here. And we should just delete everything, erase your culture, and you should be like this so that it will work. And that's anyways... blah! So my brain is feeling really juicy. I'm wondering though... Again, it's not that I'm saying that there is exactly a model. I just realized my mic is very loud because I'm excited. Oops, it's all the way up to red. But that earlier, you had said something about how this book does some modeling work, I think, about sharing knowledge. I don't remember the exact phrasing you had, but I was curious if you could say more about what you meant by that.

Heena Sharma:

Yeah. Thanks Page. I'm also like whoa, my brain is also firing in many directions because of what you just shared. And I think we have to mention special education, right, how violent that system is. And even the origins of special education are when schools were desegregating and people wanted there to be ways to still have Black kids and white kids separate, right. And they're like "Oh, let's just come up with this other thing. White teachers-

Page May:

I did not know this.

Heena Sharma:

When I first learned that, I was like "Oh shit." I actually learned it in Chicago. Fun fact.

Page May:

I did not know that. Fascinating. Okay. I cut you off. Yeah.

Heena Sharma:

It's okay! But just how important it is and connecting that with mandated reporting, incarceration, how fucked up foster care systems are... It can all start because a teacher is like "I think that Black child has behavior issues and they should have this diagnosis and be in that classroom." And then it's so many things. And how that's so common... And I have friends who've been in special education systems and how, as adults, they're still struggling with so much about the inferiority complex they have because of how people treated them, like, "Oh, you can't sit down and take a test in this way? Or you need to be in a separate room," which ends up being like... babysit—it's all these things. And I've worked with kids with autism in the past.

Heena Sharma:

And I was horrified. I was in my early twenties. I was horrified when I saw that... For some places that were supposed to provide services for kids with autism, it was like... The parents just need a break, which is real. But also you're saying you're providing services and educational support, but you're really just putting on a movie so that you can play on your phone, and just how that's such a common thing, thinking about the ableism of those kinds of diagnoses, right? If there's a perceived peak of what someone can achieve, why even put resources? It's not worth it, right. Why should money be sent to these programs when the whole point of students, right, in school is to make workers. If these people can't work and they instead need benefits, what's the point? Let's just stick them in a room. So I just had to bring that up. And I kind of forgot what your question was.

Page May:

Oh! You had mentioned that the book models how to share knowledge. You said something very specific and I wrote it down and then deleted it. And then I wrote it again. And I just deleted it again. So, something about how the book models sharing knowledge, recognizing there are no perfect blueprints for how we're going to make this world better for everyone. Does that question make sense?

Heena Sharma:

And, Page, you also just modeled it by saying how much you deleted. No, for sure. And I think because... If you read the book, Leah is talking about how she wrote this in one particular year,

but here are some additions or edits she's added or just really acknowledging what her specific experiences have been, her kind of particular set of privileges and things that she's experienced like oppressive experiences in structures and just really naming all those things. And I feel, even the way she writes, it's very... There's no shortcut to all the isms, right? She will name all the isms over and over because it's important. It's not something to just be brushed aside. Right? And even things like having an interview... She had an interview with a friend of hers, about crip sex and what crip sex is like and the good, the bad, the ugly, the real. That's what she calls it, and just that it's not this romanticized thing, but it's also something that disabled people have, it's all the stuff. And there's no kind of sense of what's not respectable enough. There's no sense of respectability in the book, right, like, "Oh, I can't talk about this stuff. I can't talk about how all the kind of bodily fluid-type things that people get queasy around." It's like "No, these are part of people's lives, right."

Heena Sharma:

I think about, there's this one example I really want to share. When she's—it's in the very beginning, the chapter on Care Webs and experiments in creating collective access, where she kind of... She details different examples of people trying to make care webs and networks for people around someone's needs. Right. And she shared one person whose name is Lori Erickson, and how it was... And this is a white, disabled person who was able to kind of build a community as a site of political organizing, even, as she incorporated folks to support her with certain needs or have a schedule to explain what does it mean to have disability justice politics? But then a critique that one of Leah's friend had shared with Leah was a wheelchair user, who's a Black femme who shared that "I'm glad Lori's model works for her. If someone drops me, if someone doesn't show up for a shift, I can die. I don't ever want to depend on being liked or loved by the community for the right to shit in my toilet when I want to." Right. And that has really stuck with me. It's on page 47. That has really stuck with me because that's so prevalent in all of our spaces. Right. How much likability is... You can't parse that away from anti-Blackness, from fat phobia, from all these different things. Right. And how it's also based on the type of disability.

Heena Sharma:

And there's plenty of reasons for disabled folks to not want to have to explain certain all these things. But it's like because this particular white person was very social and would have networks in whichever city she traveled to for her work, she was able to really cultivate this, but how that's a very rare thing. And it's actually very isolating for most folks, just wanted to highlight that.

Monica Trinidad:

Yeah. Thank you for that. I'm so, starting to get sad because we are running out of time and there are so many things I want to talk about, still. Maybe we'll have to do a part two. But I want to shift to talking about what one of your biggest takeaways from this book was? I know for me,

I've read the book. I've read it many times. And one piece that sticks with me is not only the Crip Art of Failure piece, but also that access is not an outcome. It's a process. And that's something that stuck out for me, especially, around Leah's friend and another disability justice organizer, who recently passed, Stacey Milburn, who really... you know, I have this quote underlined. "Disabled people are so much more than our access needs."

Monica Trinidad:

"We can't have a movement without safety and access. And yet there is still so much more still waiting for us collectively once we build the skillset of negotiating access needs with each other." And I love that piece because Stacey is basically just saying, can we take access needs seriously so we can make room for what's beyond this? Can we just get these basic things down? Right. And not even, I don't even want to say basic because access needs are different for everybody.

Monica Trinidad:

And it's an ongoing process. Right. But if we can't even understand the importance of live captions on virtual events, if we can't make spaces accessible with ramps, if we can't do those things, there's just so much more beyond that that disabled organizers and disabled people, disabled artists have to offer us and each other. It's mind blowing to think of the amount of visions and magic that are there that we're not able to get to yet. And so, for me, that was one of my biggest takeaways, which is how access is a process, and it's not something you can just have checkmarks and checkboxes, right. We were talking about earlier, the disability justice principles, you can't just check those off and then you've done it, you've done disability justice. Right? It's a constant process. But I would love to hear from you, Heena, what was one of your biggest takeaways from this book?

Heena Sharma:

Yeah. I'm also sad that our conversation is ending soon. I didn't realize I could talk so much, or maybe I should have realized that? Not self aware..

Monica Trinidad:

You should've realized that you are brilliant and you have so much to offer us. And we are so thankful.

Page May:

This is such a charming conversation.

Monica Trinidad:

Thank you. Leah, if you're listening, thank you for writing this book and for making this space to have this conversation.

Heena Sharma:

Yeah. I think the biggest takeaway... This book is really related to how it's impacted my organizing, I'd say. Just the fact that there's no shortcuts to this stuff... There's no checklist. And that it's about so much of unlearning what are often the cliché or one-on-one models of political campaign work, all about urgency, all about who can be out in the streets, who can do long hours of work and all this stuff, and how that drives so many folks away or doesn't even allow space for so many folks, and how that in itself is so often disabling. There are people I know who were so burnt out and harmed, either sexual violence harassment, burnout, white supremacist kind of dynamics in the movement spaces that even if they weren't any white people there, right... We know that it's not the only thing that white supremacy is about. But just that, itself, made... They were like "I need to take care of my body and my mind and my spirit, and I actually cannot do this work anymore." Right. And we know as organizers how rare it is to see older, older organizers. Right. There's folks who were like "I need to leave," and all these things and... It's heavy. And I think an aspect of that, too, is incorporating joy. I think about the spaces that I'm in... yeah in a corny way, I'm trying not to be corny, but corniness isn't bad. I should be like-

Page May:

Delicious.

Heena Sharma:

It's great. Corniness is great. But just the idea of things being fun and rejoicing and what would be an intergenerational space where people have their elders, their aunties, and their kids and daycare and all this stuff? Right. This book is literally called *Care Work*. And I think it's so hard for people to be like "So, cooking meals for community or providing food for our folks, that's organizing? I don't know. That's political work? I don't know about that." It's so hard for folks to... Or having some kind of celebration of some kind of whatever, anything! You could celebrate nothing. Create places that people want to be in that... nourish, feed your spirit. Feed your soul. And related to that, I wanted to.... Actually, my passage I'm going to read later is kind of related to that. I won't spoil it, but-

Page May:

Well, we're about to do the passage. But before we get there... So hold it in our brains. We're going to hold that. Before we have you close out with your favorite passage, is there anything else that you'd like to share with us before you wrap up knowing this is only the beginning, and we only went surface deep? Anything else you want to share?

Heena Sharma:

Can I share a list of resources and different folks that are currently doing so much work, whether it's on Twitter or all these things that I just appreciate so much. And they're not in the form of a

book, but the fact that people are just constantly having these conversations, developing tools and strategies... And there's a lot of folks who don't get... There's someone named Estelle Ellison, who is an anarchist Black, disabled person who goes by Abolish Time on social media. I learned so much from them. And it's very sharp critiques on trans misogyny and ableism and all this stuff. Right. There's a zine called Sick of It! It's a collaboration between inside, outside folks where it includes writing by disabled incarcerated folks. And it's also a conversation. So it's disabled folks on both sides communicating to each other, building relationships, and disabled pen pals being matched together with disabled... There's so many things that are going on, and people are experimenting with it. I just really want to share them with you all. There's a lot more. Okay.

Page May:

Yes, please do.

Monica Trinidad:

Definitely.

Monica Trinidad:

So, folks who are listening, if you have not read *Care Work* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, please go out and get the book now, support your local independent bookstore. And, Heena, thank you for your time. And I'm so glad that we made this work. Third time is a charm. I also love that there's... Folks can't see this, but Page has a cat, Mama Oats, who was ready to talk on the mic at one point. Heena has this little Shih Tzu dog that's curled up in their lap. I don't have any pets around me. I think my cat is with my partner in another room, but... So just wanted to name that cuteness.

Heena Sharma:

There's so much life everywhere.

Monica Trinidad:

There's so much life everywhere.

Page May:

You're surrounded by plants.

Monica Trinidad:

I'm surrounded by plants. That's right. I have plants here. Well, thank you so much, Heena. We want to close our episode...

Heena Sharma:

Thank you. This is amazing. Thank you! This is amazing.

Monica Trinidad:

I'm so happy. We want to close out our episode with just hearing one of your favorite passages from the book and then we'll end there. So take it away, Heena.

Heena Sharma:

Thank you again for having me you all. So this is from the chapter *For Badass Disability Justice, Working-Class and Poor-Led Models of Sustainable Hustling for Liberation*. And this is a reference to a piece that you all may be familiar with, that went pretty viral in 2012. It's B. Loewe's piece called An End to Self Care. And B. Loewe is a white non-binary able-bodied labor organizer. So I'm going to read two paragraphs. "Sure, movements can be healing, but are they? Many, many broke folks, parents and or disabled folks who have been forced out of movements would say no. What disability justice and healing justice talks about and asks is, are they really? Or are they set up in burnout models that destroy folks physical and spiritual health?"

Heena Sharma:

And I think that's a big part of what movements I'm part of due to make movements that aren't shitty is centering disabled working class and poor parenting and femme of color genius. Burnout isn't just about not having a deep enough analysis. It's about movements that are deeply ableist and inaccessible." I mean, you all should just read the whole thing, but continue a few paragraphs down is. "Let's tease it out further. When my friends who use power wheelchairs need a personal care attendant many times a day to pee and transfer from bed to chair, is that self care? It's not commonly thought of that way. But it's part of the whole continuum of bodily need that gets trashed as a pain in the ass by an ableist world."

Heena Sharma:

Loewe writes, 'I have literally gone from being a debilitating pain and only being able to accomplish three hours of work each day, to working 18 hour shifts the same week in a completely different context. The difference was not the conditions of my work, it was my connection to my purpose,' end quote. I'm glad that works for them, but as a friend of mine remarked, 'Okay, that method does not work for some of us. Some of us are in debilitating pain, no matter what.' And to say that we can just be more deeply committed to the struggle and leave our disabilities behind is an incredibly dangerous ableist stance to take that also just plain ignores the reality that some people are just disabled and can't think or organize our way to able-bodiedness."

[outro music fades in]

Monica Trinidad:

Thanks for listening to another episode of the Lit Review, a podcast where we interview people we love and respect about a book that has shaped their organizing work. We are your co-hosts, Monica Trinidad and Page May, two Chicago-based abolitionists, cultural workers, and cat mamas who love nerding out on books and creating spark notes for our movements. Audio production this season by Benji Russelburg, music by TASHA, podcast theme intro by David Ellis with production by Ari Mejia, and social media support from Alycia Kamil. If you like this episode, give it a shoutout on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook, and if you like our podcast, leave us a review on Apple Podcasts to help widen our reach. Financial support for the production of this podcast season is thanks to the Field Foundation of Illinois, and our amazing Patreon subscribers. Learn more about becoming a patron at Patreon.com/thelitreview. Keep reading!