

Phil Dallmann: Hello, inclusion believers, and welcome to The Access Champions Podcast. I'm your host, Phil Dallmann, for this week's journey into the galaxies of accessibility, diversity, and inclusion. Uh, we got a-, another great episode for you guys this week, from, my trip to Chicago, back from February. Now, with Katie O'Neill, um, who is a student and an artist, uh, over at the Art Institute School, um, in Chicago, and, um, really a fascinating conversation. And I'll be candid, I really didn't know what the conversation would be about when we were connected by a couple of weeks' ago's guest, Lucas Livingston.

Phil Dallmann: We sat down in her studio, and just started chatting, and she's doing just incredible work in, in the world of, uh, art and mental illness, and connecting it with language, and, and looking at how language operates. And as a fellow, she's a fellow New Jerseyan, uh, which I always, uh, always love. Uh, but just a really awesome conversation. It's a little bit of a longer one, so I want to keep this intro short.

Phil Dallmann: Um, but I, uh, as always, want to encourage you guys to follow us on social media. Our associate producer, Ms. Kelsey Rose Brown, and soon-to-be-published author. If you listened to last week's episode, her book, Come on, Calm!, uh, comes out in just a couple of weeks. But it is available for pre-order and you can find those links on social media, um, or just, uh, look for Come on, Calm!, on Amazon or Barnes & Noble, um, really most places where you would order books. But if you follow us on social media, you already know that, uh, along with a lot of other fun things that happen around the world of accessibility, diversity and inclusion. Um, Kelsey does a really great job of curating really wonderful content. Uh, we promise we'll never flood your feed. Uh, it's always quality over quantity, uh, here with The Access Champions Podcast.

Phil Dallmann: And if you would like to follow us, or @accesschampion on Instagram and Twitter, and The Access Champions Podcast on Facebook, and if you are listening to us anywhere, we, we hope you'll give us either a little like, a click on that subscribe button, so you don't miss any episode ever, um, and if you have you know all of 90 seconds, and you want to write us a sentence or two as a review, we always really appreciate that. And if you have any thoughts that you want to share, or, um, ideas or folks who think it would be great for us to talk to, um, go ahead and, and, uh, reach out to us at AccessChampion@gmail.com. We're always down to chat. We're always looking for new things to chat about, um, and new folks to chat with. So, uh, you know, again, that's accesschampion@gmail.com.

Phil Dallmann: And let's go ahead and just jump right on into it. Without further ado, Access Champion, Katie O'Neill.

Phil Dallmann: All right. And we are here with Katie O'Neill, who is a graduate student here at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago. Uh, thanks, to, for taking the time to chat.

Katie O'Neill: Yeah, no problem. Thank you.

Phil Dallmann: Uh, Katie came highly recommended from Lucas Livinston over at The, uh, The Art Institute, um, uh, as a, as a definite interview to, to have during my, uh, trip here to Chicago, uh, with the podcast. So, very excited. Um, I always love hearing people's journeys, uh, and we, we, we spoke, uh, on the elevator ride up, and I love finding out that other people are also from New jersey.

Katie O'Neill: (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: Uh, so, I, I'd love to hear a little bit about your journey into, into the arts and into, uh, what you're working on now.

Katie O'Neill: Sure. Well, again, thank you for having me. So, I come from a very, very small town in Jersey. Uh, it's called Cookstown, and it's right nestled in, in the heart of it, in between both the shore and Philadelphia so-

Phil Dallmann: (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: ... a lot of farmland. I grew up on three acres of land. Uh, so, I was definitely a, a nature kid, and I spent a lot of time out in nature. But when I got into my undergrad, and up to here, I've lived in the city. So, it was, it seemed like a pretty drastic transition, but my father also lived in Philadelphia-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... while I was a kid, so it kind of just moved right in there. But I actually do love living in, in the urban landscape. It's very independent, and lots of resources.

Katie O'Neill: Um, but actually for the longest time, and I still see those themes into my artistic practice today is that I wanted to be an archeologist-

Phil Dallmann: Okay. (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: ... and I feel like a lot of that was because I always digging holes in my yard (laughing) trying to find stuff. I mean, uh, my house is really old. My childhood home was, like, built in 1890-something, um, and it, of course, was, like, used to be under water, so I would find all these like clams, clam shells and things-

Phil Dallmann: Oh, okay.

Katie O'Neill: ... and also pottery shards, like really deep down into the soil. And I guess that's-

Phil Dallmann: So you were doing actual archeology-

Katie O'Neill: (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: ... as a kid, as a, as opposed to me, who was just digging holes, h-, and telling my mom this rock was a dinosaur egg. (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: Right. No, I was like, "I want to find what's in here." I was so fascinated with the possibility of uncovering new things.

Phil Dallmann: Mmm.

Katie O'Neill: I feel like that's such a big drive for me. Um, and I really, as a kid, was never like art-focused. I don't know. It just wasn't, like, "Oh, I love art." (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... Um, but then once I got later into high school, I realized that it was an important outlet for something that I was actually hiding for a long time-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... um, and so, when I was about eight, seven, I was in second grade, I saw my first hallucination-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... and, but, when you're, like, a really young kid, that, you (laughs) think that you can see and talk to ghosts. Like, I was like, "This is a, a logical explanation." (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: Absolutely.

Katie O'Neill: Um, because, a lot of the hallucinations that I see are, like, dark figures, um, and it was always sort of this ominous thing, you know. They were never ... At first I was really terrified of them, but as I, you know, kept seeing them, since then, it just became like, in a weird familiar thing, but I didn't know how yet to talk to people about it. Also, I was like, "I don't really know if I should." I didn't want to get, the, the risk of being bullied.

Phil Dallmann: Right.

Katie O'Neill: 'Cause I was already being bullied for other things. (laughs) So-

Phil Dallmann: I know.

Katie O'Neill: ... I don't really want to tell people that. Um, but then, as I got into my adolescence, I started to develop, like, other symptoms, you know, like a lot of mood instability. I recognized that I was reacting much more intensely to things, and, than other people were. Like, I was a very conscious child, still am, but especially young, I was able to see, like, this is, this is different. I feel different, and I don't think that people are ser-, seeing and hearing the things that I do. Um, but again, I had no real outlet to, to really begin talking about these things. And so, I was, I went to my first art class, junior year, 'cause I had to take an elective (laughing). So, I just took art, Art I, and, um, I wasn't very good at drawing. Actually, I hate drawing. (laughs) 'Cause I didn't, I was never interested in drawing from life, because I would rather take what was inside of me, and make something out of that.

Katie O'Neill: I felt like there was so much, like a wealth of resource within that you didn't need to source from the outside. You know, I was interested in producing a new image or making something that's invisible visible, right? And I realized that that was the first form of therapy that I had-

Phil Dallmann: Mmm.

Katie O'Neill: ... and my, my mother, you know ... Bless her heart. I love my mother. She's my best friend ... But she did not believe that I was mentally ill-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... or that there was anything wrong, you know? I started to, start to introduce, like I was 14, or 15, that it's possible I have bipolar. I, I started doing all this, like (laughs) Web MD research, right?

Phil Dallmann: I mean, self-diagnosing via Web MD.

Katie O'Neill: See, it's that archeo-, archeological thing-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... I feel like I have to uncover. I need to figure out what this is.

Phil Dallmann: And it can go one, either way, where you either-

Katie O'Neill: (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: ... like, a, looking for something that's actually there, or, uh, in the case of, uh, my sister, would self-diagnose off just about the sniffles. So, we had to block her-

Katie O'Neill: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: ... from Web MD.

Katie O'Neill: Oh. (laughing) yeah. It's, it could be, it could go either way. (laughs). So, right. And, it was ... It was just so frustrating, you know. I feel like my teenage years was just really, really hard, and, um, when I started school. I started school at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... which is an art school, and I went in for art education, because I felt that my teacher had such an impact on me, my art teacher, in high school, 'cause she, you know, she didn't know exactly everything that was going on, but my work was starting to explain something to her. And she was like, "I think that you have a voice that can help other people"-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... "do that." And so, I, I switched gears, and I was like, "All right." (laughs) "I'll do that." You know, instead of archeology. I sort of put it on the shelf, um, even though that, that theme of uncovering is still re-occurring in the work. And, um, so I really, I started with painting. I was a painter, and very, like, expressive painter. And I discovered performance art by accident. (laughing) like, in my undergrad. I, I started using my whole body-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... to paint something. You know, if I was feeling I needed to do a really aggressive painting. You know, I was looking at like, [Carol Ishima 00:09:34], and, who, in her feminist work was always using her nude body to make, to make paintings live, and someone then at that point was like, "Oh, have you heard of performance art?" You know? And I didn't have dance training as a kid. I did theater for like a year, so it didn't really strike out to me-

Phil Dallmann: Mmm.

Katie O'Neill: ... that I would have a movement practice? But I started to really fall in love with the possibilities that performance art provided more than just painting. You know, it felt ... I have in all of my madness, I have all this energy between my head and down all the way to my toes, and to have just that energy flow up

through your arm onto a flat surface, it was like not enough. Like, I just didn't feel enough. And I wasn't communicating all of that energy quite enough, how I, from what I believe to my, um, the any of my audience or viewers of my work. And, it was like, by the time, it was the end of my undergrad that I realized that movement work was going to be the best way for me to start really explaining to people the full extent of what having madness, having mental illness, really does to the whole body.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: You know, like people really understand more than when you just say, "Like, I'm feeling anxious." When you show your, how your body's moving, while you're saying the word anxious, there seems to be a greater connection, like, "Oh, I really feel that, that anxiety." You know-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... it's that body-to-body connection. Um, but in my undergrad, I didn't, again, have a lot of experience with performance art, 'cause there was only one or two faculty that did do it.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: So, then I felt a great deficit, and I'm looking at, you know, the rest of my adulthood (laughs) and my life ahead of me, and my career, and I'm like, "I don't feel prepared." Right? "I feel ..." So, I decided to look around, you know, and see what I might want to do for my MFA, and I saw that the School of the Art Institute has a performance program for a Master's. I was like, "Oh!" (laughs) You know, and it's-

Phil Dallmann: There you go! (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: ... Yeah, I mean, they em-, they empathize. Like, in-, interdisciplinary approach. You know, like, "Do painting and performance or sculpture or all three." Like, tons and tons of stuff, and I liked that it wasn't just theater. Like, it was really strictly open, like, performance art. And I don't know, by the grace of the Lord, someone, something, I got in. I really didn't think that I was going to get-

Phil Dallmann: (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: ... I was like really surprised. (laughs) I was like, "Oh, okay. Cool." And, when I arrived here in Chicago to start my studies here, in 2017 (laughs) I just, I had this, like, wealth of stuff, like in my arms, you know, like all of these details that I was uncovering, and scratching to the surface for the past four years, you know, end of high school, all of my undergrad, and I didn't know how to put any of these pieces together. Like, it was ... I could not do an artist, even, like it



changed every three weeks. 'Cause I was always onto the next thing, and I couldn't find like that overall theme of like what is all this work about? Like, why, what, what are you trying to say about your madness? What are you trying to put it at, you know?

Katie O'Neill: And, 2016 and 2017 were such pivotal years in my life so far, because that was when I had my two diagnoses-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... which for me, um, the diagnoses were so important, because that was like a category that I belong to, right? It was, I was no longer in this sort of inexplicable frontier, like, I, I had a set of criteria where other people belonged. 'Cause for so long-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah, it's community.

Katie O'Neill: ... Yes. It was, it was, it's really isolating, 'cause, you know, it's not visible, it's not physical, so people don't realize it. You are the thing.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: Um, and so, I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, after my first, um, [inaudible 00:13:29] knock on wood, (laughs) hospitalization in 2016. And then I was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder in 2017, and that was because I started to be honest about the symptoms, that I was lying about before.

Phil Dallmann: That's so important. I mean, I, um, I, I navigate depression, and-

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: ... um, that diagnosis came, uh, too late-

Katie O'Neill: Mmm.

Phil Dallmann: ... um, and, and, because I wasn't being, I wasn't being honest with the people around me, or to, you know, doctors I met with about what, like, I actually was feeling, or what I was actually, uh, yeah, feeling in my bones, you know-

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: ... in a lot of ways. So, yeah, it's, it's, but it, it takes ... I, um, have found, uh, I've had to, like, okay with like, you know, all right, you weren't honest, but you also were young, and-



Katie O'Neill: Mmm.

Phil Dallmann: ... uh, there's a maturity that, that comes-

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: ... uh, with, uh, wanting to have self-care, in that way.

Katie O'Neill: Well, yeah.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: I mean, it's a, it's a terrifying endeavor, even to, to confess these things-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... You know, like what ... It also didn't make sense to me, even to try to start talking about it, because from what I know of the schizophrenias and the history, from what I was taught, as a young child, is like, I didn't fit into that.

Phil Dallmann: Right.

Katie O'Neill: You know, I've always been high-functioning, and getting good grades, and being able to balance both of these things, and pass, you know, the idea of passing in disability-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... No one realizes or, or would think that I'm hearing voices at the same time that they're talking to me.

Phil Dallmann: And there's such, uh, I can't think of a better word, but like aggressive depictions of it in media that I'm sure, uh, would, you know, put you off from, from identifying in that way-

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: ... or maybe not feel like you identify, uh, under that sort of archetype.

Katie O'Neill: Yeah. It's, it's, um, and it's not to say that those realities aren't true-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... 'cause they very much are, but what I didn't know, and I feel most people don't know, although we should (laughs), is that there's such a variation. Like, just in any other kind of disability, how it affects that person-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... Right? Very different degrees of severity. Symptoms are changing, for different people.

Phil Dallmann: It's a spectrum.

Katie O'Neill: Yeah,

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: And people think, like, how media, you know, shows it, there's just one image, um, and so, for that, that really skewed my identity, 'cause I'm like, "Well, if that's the one image, I'm not in that, but I have these very similar symptoms, but I'm not in that." Right?

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: So, I was really, I was like, cornered, where I had family who weren't willing to listen yet, and then just me not even knowing (laughs) how to go about feeling about it, or who to talk to, um, and it was really when I finally, "Oh, Lord, after all these years, getting these diagnoses," and I should also say, be-, because of my high functionality, (laughs) I've had several psychs push back-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... and be like, "No! You're not that." And like, "Well, how do you explain these symptoms together?" (laughs) Right? Um, schizoaffective is, is sort of a marriage between bipolar and schizophrenia.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: It has, it ta-, it draws symptoms from both, and again, with that spectrum, some people might have all of 'em, some of 'em, a few of 'em, right?

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: For me, I, I have very little depressive episodes. I'm actually almost always manic, right?

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



Katie O'Neill: Manic, or in the middle. And, um, and I only have a few of the schizophrenic symptoms, like, you know, I'm, I have delusions, and hallucinations and paranoia, but I don't really have a lot of the negative symptoms of it, you know? So it was always a weird a-, again, it's like, "I don't know." And it seems the way that schizoaffective is taught in the medical model, I guess, (laughs) from my associations to fight psychiatrists is that it's taught in that same kind of way, that you have to be very obviously severe, you know, and I, I always thought that was strange-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... and it's really, like, limiting, you know? Like-

Phil Dallmann: (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: ... "Okay, then where do I fit belong? And they say, "Well, maybe you're just, I don't know, whah." (laughing) They don't have the answer for me. And that's not right, so, um eventually, I, you know, the psych that I have now, he was like, "Oh, yeah." (laughing) You know, but that took-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... be, after the other two that I had. The one of them didn't even know what schizoaffective was, so I had to get a new one-

Phil Dallmann: Oh, that's not a-

Katie O'Neill: Right?

Phil Dallmann: ... that's not a great starting spot.

Katie O'Neill: No, no, no.

Phil Dallmann: (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: And it, a lot of it was also very self-care. Like, you mention, like, I had to go again, with my archeological roots and really research and be honest with myself, like, "Do you have these?" "Yes. You're above other things. You know, it's not just bipolar. 'Cause I have these symptoms outside of manic episodes. I have them all the time. I'm hallucinating now. Like, I do it all the time. (laughs) so that's why I didn't fit in bipolar, and then I have these ups and downs, like bipolar, so it's not just schizophrenia, right?

Phil Dallmann: Okay.

Katie O'Neill: And so, I really had to be active in my own, you know, agency, like, autonomy on order to get to the place I'm in now. So, really the journey started at such a young age, and it didn't really feel, you know-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah, that's a tremendous-

Katie O'Neill: (laughs) It's a lot.

Phil Dallmann: ... uh, tremendous journey. Uh-

Katie O'Neill: Yeah.

Phil Dallmann: ... to, to getting a diagnosis, uh-

Katie O'Neill: And passing for 15 years-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah, that's-

Katie O'Neill: ... pretty much, with no medication, no therapy, like, I don't know how I did it. (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: That's, that, I mean, that's a testament to you. I think, again, you, your, uh, it's a, it sounds like, um, incredible persistence, one-

Katie O'Neill: Mmm.

Phil Dallmann: ... um, and then again, that archeological background that you have (laughing), uh, just, kind of searching for the answer.

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: Uh, and, and really, uh, not relenting till you had it. Um, so that, that's fantastic.

Katie O'Neill: Yeah.

Phil Dallmann: Uh, so you landed in Chicago.

Katie O'Neill: I am.

Phil Dallmann: You landed at the, uh, the School, the School of the Art Institute. Um, what uh, since you've been here, what have you been working on, as you sort of now, you said you came here with all these details and then not sure-

Katie O'Neill: Mmm.



Phil Dallmann: ... how they all connected. What have you, uh, uh ... How have you been connecting them?

Katie O'Neill: So, the first year It's, it's a two-year program-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... I'm now graduating in May. So, I have a few months left.

Phil Dallmann: Congratulations.

Katie O'Neill: Thank you. But the first year was so hard, I thought (laughing), I cried all the time, (laughs) 'cause I just-

Phil Dallmann: That sounds like grad school, yeah. (laughing)

Katie O'Neill: ... I had all these ideas and details that I had scratched, right? And I just didn't know how to put them together or what I was trying to do, and so I was trying out all these different ideas, and it was like, I would deviate from the path and go down this one idea for three months, (laughs) and then be like, ... you know, and go back to the path, and then do a completely different project on the other side of the road. And then go back, and someone would ask me, like, "What's your work about?" Like, "What's the message?" (laughs) and I didn't have one, 'cause I was just ... You know, like in the fall, I was doing all this painting stuff, and really looking deep within myself, and then in the spring, I like, abandoned painting, and I started doing research and almost like, archeological research in, um, cemeteries and old psychiatric hospitals-

Phil Dallmann: Okay.

Katie O'Neill: In and, in and around Chicago-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... um, because then I became really interested in the history of madness-

Phil Dallmann: Mmm.

Katie O'Neill: ... You know, like maybe the history can inform the movement work that I'm doing present day. So, it was like a complete switch from like the inside of myself, to the literal outside and lives of other people. So, I had no idea how to talk about my work (laughs) 'cause I just did such a flip-side, kind of like a borderline joke, you know, borderline personality disorder (laughs), it's like black and white thinking-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... you're like, either this or this. So, people were (laughs) making a joke, and it's okay. It was a joke. (laughing) But, um, it was in the spring of last year, and I guess, I could just ... I thank this woman, probably for every darn day of my life ... Um, she was my adviser, Erica Mott, and she just, the, it took like one word, like one thing that I had never heard of from me, she'd be like, "That's, this is the thing I would go, go from." You know, she saw that I was, um, interpreting a drawing that I had made while I was psychotic, like, while I was in a psychotic, psychosis state-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... um, and I was like looking at it, you know, 'cause it's, it's always a myth, 'cause I don't usually remember when I'm like or what happened when I'm in psychosis.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: And someone tells me what happened, or what I was doing, and it just seemed liked this other side of me that was like a, a mythological being, or like, Mr. Hyde, right?

Phil Dallmann: Mmm.

Katie O'Neill: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Um, so I was interpreting this drawing, trying to see if I could, you know, conjure what my body was doing from the drawing.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: And my teacher said, "Oh, you know, this reminds me of something called Labanotation. Have you heard of that?" I said, "No." (laughing) And it is a choreographed system. Laban, he's like the dude that made it. You know, they always name things after the white guy. (laughs) Ay!

Phil Dallmann: (laughs) Yeah, it's a, yes!

Katie O'Neill: (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: I mean, yes. (laughing) Unfortunately.

Katie O'Neill: And, um, it's, it's a system where it's kind of like music notes-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... where if you read these symbols put together, you would know how to perform this movement. It's like a language that you have to learn-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... and once you know how to, you know, read the language, then you can perform the score of the movement that the, the director, the choreographer made, which I was really fascinated with. And, um, I spent the whole summer last year, of 2018 (laughs) ...

Phil Dallmann: Yes.

Katie O'Neill: ... I was like, what year is it? (laughing) um, reading this whole Labanotation bible, and learning it, trying to, 'cause it's, it was so complex. You know, there's so many little details, because it's this, it's the same system, the same symbol where it's like a rectangle in the middle, and it has a line going down the middle, that's supposed to be the core of your body.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: And the left side and the right side of the rectangle are the, both halves of your body.

Phil Dallmann: Okay.

Katie O'Neill: So, if there's like markings on one side, you would know, like, that's how far your right arm goes out.

Phil Dallmann: Ah!

Katie O'Neill: And then your left ar-, your left leg is divoting at the same time, right? So, it's, it's learning all these the things, and, but you would be able to, p-, perform something that was made like, you know, 100 years ago, or whatever. But like, just seeing these symbols and knowing how to interpret or move to something was really fascinating to me. And I'm like, "All right, well, this system's just way too much." (laughing) I don't, I don't want to use this, this whole big thing, but I like the, the methodology of it-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... you know? I like that this is a set of symbols that you interpret to make movement. And so I really just took that bare-bones thing, and was like, what if I made a symbol for every symptom that I have, a drawn symbol?

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



Katie O'Neill: And then I interpreted those symbols into a gesture. And so, if I did a gesture, that would represent mania, for example.

Phil Dallmann: Mmm.

Katie O'Neill: And, in my studio, you'd see behind you (laughs) I have this whole list of all of my-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah!

Katie O'Neill: ... symptoms. It's about 36, or 37 of 'em. And, um, I, for the past is it half a year now? Went through the process of developing a movement for all of these symptoms, with an accompanied, you know, drawn gesture. And it's like a huge library I have on my computer of all of this stuff, right? This huge archive. And it's just really, like, it's now like a sign language-

Phil Dallmann: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... My partner and I ... My partner's also a mad person. They have depression as well. And, so, they went along and made their own symbols and gestures, so now we can like communicate with each other (laughs) when we're feeling something.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: And it's been an invaluable resource when I'm psychotic, or having a panic attack. And they're like, "What's going on? What are you feeling? What do you need?" And I could just do like, the sign, for frustration, or that I'm hallucinating, and they would know. 'Cause a lot of the times, I can't speak when I have all this stuff happening-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... I literally can't speak when I'm psychotic, 'cause my brain just shuts off in a lot of ways. I don't know how it happens, but I just like, I can't ... It just comes out in fragments, um, and so it's a real actual tool for me, and my partner, and it's, you know, my ... I started to make movement a work about it too, in terms of my performative practice, and I would do like, uh, performative lectures-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... So, while I'm talking about what it's like, um, to have a panic attack or psychotic episode, if I would put my symptoms in the script that I'm speaking, so then when I would say, you know, for example, memory loss, I would do the gesture at the same time I said memory loss, and it, it was, yeah, it's like

language, you know. It was more than just verbal language, which I think it's not. Like when you think about care and what's provided for people, disabled folks, especially, like therapy, it's almost always like talk therap-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... and like, what if I don't have the vernacular yet to talk about my stuff, right? (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: Like can, can we use the body first, and then speech? Right?

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: I want to just sort of explore that, and I said, "Well, what if I could do this now with other people? Like, other disabled folk? Other people with invisible disabilities, like, mad people, sick people, right? Blind, deaf, like all, all of my invisible pals, right?" Because we struggle with not being physical, and people not believing us, so, we're actually visualizing the symptoms that are contained within our bodies outwards. (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: Yeah! That, no, that's, that's incredibly fascinating.

Katie O'Neill: Yeah.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: So, that's, um, and so you kind of asked like, "What are you doing now?"

Phil Dallmann: (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: Right? 'Cause that was like all the way up until now.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: And now I've, I'm doing like the pilot program.

Phil Dallmann: Okay.

Katie O'Neill: So, for my MFA thesis, we have like a live impact festival, that you can participate in. And, um, it's really cool. I'm very excited. And since the fall, I've been crowdsourcing. Trying to get people who have an invisible disability, and are interested in performing, right? That's, that's two really significant things to

ask of someone is to openly identify (laughs) as disabled and be willing to perform.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: So, I, but, just amazingly, I've had 16 people-

Phil Dallmann: That's, that is amazing.

Katie O'Neill: And I'm like (laughs), like I only know five of them. Like I don't know-

Phil Dallmann: Wow.

Katie O'Neill: ... a lot of them, and they're not all from my school, you know. Um, some of them I just know through Chicago's Disability Culture events-

Phil Dallmann: Hmm.

Katie O'Neill: ... some of them are from University of Chicago, some of them are from University of Illinois, or Chicago, right? (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: All of these ... or Northwestern-

Phil Dallmann: Mmm.

Katie O'Neill: ... there's people from Northwestern, and I just met them for the first time last Wednesday.

Phil Dallmann: Oh.

Katie O'Neill: So, we're going to have a workshop every Wednesday until Impact, which is April 14th, so like, less than two months now, um, to-

Phil Dallmann: Coming up! (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: ... Yeah, and they're, they're going to do the same system that I just explained

Phil Dallmann: Mmm.

Katie O'Neill: ... where they'll be looking at, um, at least 15 symptoms, 'cause you know, some people ... We have a lot, so, for the sake of the performance and we only have 45 minutes to an hour-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... um, we're just keeping at 15, (laughs) um, developing the drawn symbols, translating them into the physical gestures, and then there will be a collaborative performance-

Phil Dallmann: Okay.

Katie O'Neill: ... Uh, my role in this is as facilitator, and director. So, I will actually not be in the work. I'm here to help guide everyone through these community meetings-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... right?, where we're, everyone's building their own individual choreography.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: I'm just there to, to guide the process, and um, compose the piece in the end. You know, everything else is like, like, all of the script that's going to be produced is all of their writings, all of the movements, are their movements. I'm just organizing it.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: And, um, I have something exciting to share. (laughing) So, with this project happening now, and from what I'm looking at in my future, I actually just found out on Valentine's Day that I was accepted into the doctoral program of Disability Studies at UIC.

Phil Dallmann: Congratulations!

Katie O'Neill: Thank you! And, um, I plan to really find out how I can make the system sustainable as a community engagement thing, or-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... for, for lots of communities. (laughs) 'Cause there's a lot of logistical things I can't answer here in art school.

Phil Dallmann: No.

Katie O'Neill: Also, just disability knowledge in general, I would like to, to know more about, 'cause the third goal, is, um, too much-

Phil Dallmann: (laughs)

Katie O'Neill: ... disability dialogue here, I will say. Um, but I'm excited to ... You know, I still do my own solo practice. Like, where I'm sort of exploring and uncovering things in myself, but I really want to be more involved with other people, and build this community that I didn't have when I was younger-

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: ... I was like, "I don't even know who else is disabled." (laughing) You know, 'cause I don't, I don't have a physical disability, and so how can I tell who I'm in a community with?

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: Because we're all ... And even just the, the struggles of identifying as having a disability or an invisible disability or as being mad, as mentally ill, right?, in this society is, there's, there's a lot of-

Phil Dallmann: There's stigmas and, and things that you have to navigate, yeah.

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: Absolutely.

Katie O'Neill: And I'm just hoping that, um, that this can be sort of that in-between between not having care and seeing a therapist, because there's so many barriers in be-, like getting to that point.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: Right? You have to be able to afford-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... even just to see a primary doctor, because most times therapists need a referral, right?

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: And there's so many steps to doing that? And even when you start therapy, right?, it's, it's getting that diagnosis. You know, a lot of times you and your therapist might not jive. And then you've just spent money for a therapist that you don't work out with. Um, and then there's a psychiatrist, which is another step of referral. And then months it takes to find medications that work for you.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Which are also not cheap.

Katie O'Neill: No, which are not cheap. And it's just, it's so inaccessible, and the amount ... The amount, I say that funny because there's not a lot of resources (laughs) for us, um, especially the sick and mad folk, and I'm like, we have to really, like, what of our, what are our alternatives to the medical model?

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: Because the medical model doesn't work, and support everyone. And it's, it's a serious thing, and people are, you know, dying and they're wondering, like, how this is happening. Like, well, huh? (laughing)

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: It's because you have all these things that, barriers in place. So, what if there is a center, you know, where people can come, as they wish. You know, they don't have to come every week. Maybe it's just like, "I just need to go and be in this community for this day, or just move my body in a space where this is, this is actually the theme of it, you know?" It's not like a yoga class, where you're just going to sit there and listen to someone be like, "Let's just feel peaceful." Or just a regular dance class. Like this is a movement class for you to work out your symptoms.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: You know, you don't have to share what those symptoms are. If you just want to go do it, but know that you're in a space where other people are doing that as well. That's the goal. You know, I really want to ... If, for all the knowledge that I receive here, and at UIC, if I can help provide those resources for self-empowerment, like, self-agency, you know, giving someone the tools to really start digging inside of themselves first, and if they're able to then go into the medical model, that's gr-, that's great (laughs), 'cause you know, it, it is beneficial if you can get there, if it is accessible for you.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: But, for many, it's not.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: And there's not a lot of other options to have this kind of dialogue. You know?

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: 'Cause also, yoga doesn't work for everyone.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: Yoga doesn't work for me 'cause I need to actually do like aggressive movement-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... for me to really feel like I'm getting the shit out.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: And it's got to be ... And, and , and, I, you know, we were talking about, you know, spectrums-

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: ... there's a spectrum in what works in self-care. Uh-

Katie O'Neill: Right.

Phil Dallmann: ... and um, everyone, uh, everyone's different. Like (laughs)-

Katie O'Neill: Right.

Phil Dallmann: ... that's the thing that I think gets lost a lot of time in the medical model is they want ... There's a lot of times where it's like a catch-all.

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: We want to be able to just do this one thing, and, um ... Or even in the non-medical model, sometimes, it's like, "Well, just, just do this"-

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: ... "this one thing, it works for everybody, with this diagnosis," and the reality is each individual should be treated as an individual-

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: ... and, and, and, what works for one person is not going to work for the other. And so, I, I think what you're, uh, aspiring to do there, in that idea of the center, I think is tremendous-

Katie O'Neill: Mmm.

Phil Dallmann: ... and, uh, needed.

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: It's, it's really, really needed. Um, as you said it, we're, uh, while other national emergencies have been declared-

Katie O'Neill: (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: ... um, I, uh, I would consider mental health a, a national emergency in a lot of ways here. Um, because of those barriers that are in place, and, and, and, um, and other reasons, whether it's culturally ... Um, you know, we had, uh, the podcast, uh, a few months ago, uh, a, a, Carlita Victoria who runs a group called Darkness Rising-

Katie O'Neill: Mmm.

Phil Dallmann: ... and she was talking about navigating, uh, mental health in the black community-

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: ... uh, where, you know, she was often told to just pray on it.

Katie O'Neill: [inaudible 00:35:32]

Phil Dallmann: And you know, which was such a stigma there, and then, and, you know, Aaron, we had, uh, you know, uh, Aaron Gold on, who, who created, uh, uh, an improv show called You Are Not Alone, um, a joyful show about depression. An, an-

Katie O'Neill: Mmm.

Phil Dallmann: ... improv show. And he navigates it that way, but, uh, how many people are going to come up to, to you and, and recommend improv? Or, you know-

Katie O'Neill: Right. (laughs)

Phil Dallmann: ... or a, a dance ... You know, even a dance class, like that, and say, "You know, that's what you need."

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: But in reality that's what the individual needs. And, that's so important. Um, I'll, I want to be, uh, respectful of your time. Uh, uh, and I'm incredibly grateful. This has been a fascinating conversation.

Katie O'Neill: Mmm.

Phil Dallmann: Um, hey, I'll get you out of here on this. Is there anybody else out there that, uh, you think is doing ... oh, you mentioned a few people, but that you think are doing great work out there?

Katie O'Neill: Oh (laughs), there's so many. Uh, when I really ... How do I say? ... just the Disability Arts and Culture here in Chicago has changed my life. I mean, really, I had never seen so many amazing disabled artists do like, producing fantastic work, and that's really been the drive for me even start doing this work, and so, two artists that come to mind immediately that I am just always inspired by and floored every time I see their work is, um, Matt Bodett-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... who is a Chicago-based artist here. He also has schizoaffective disorder, and he's the only schizophrenic I've ever met that's been open about it.

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: And so, his work and just hearing him speak on panels is just ... I drop his name all the time. Like, I can't just thank him enough for doing that, and shedding light on it, because I mean, he, as a practicing artist, he is a faculty member affiliate at two different schools. Like, he does a lot, and he's gone through a lot, and it's just helpful to, to see that other ... his perspective of being psychotic as well. So, I really encourage people to, to see his work as well. Matt Bodett.

Katie O'Neill: And also [Barack Desole 00:37:41]. So, he ... I'm pretty sure he's based in Toronto, but he's done quite a few events down here in Chicago. And he is, uh, fantastic ... I'm like ... he did a performance at the Art Institute as well, last year, I think. Up and Down is what it was called.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah, I think, uh, Lucas was telling me about this one-

Katie O'Neill: Yeah.

Phil Dallmann: ... during the tour.

Katie O'Neill: Yeah. I was in it too. (laughs) I was, like, one of the, the, the ... 'Cause I was an intern there, at the time. I was holding one his, um, his, um ... How do I say it? ... It was one of the parts to his wheelchair.



Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: 'Cause it was de-assembled, and we were like holding it for him. Or, it was ... Oh, no, it was actually a crutch. Actually, I was holding the crutch, I think, or a wheel. One of those. It was like a procession, and, um, I just feel, he's such a crucial voice, because as you mention, and even just ... I feel like this is a myth somehow. I don't know how, like, to, to white people (laughs) but the disability rights movement is very white-centric.

Phil Dallmann: Oh, yeah.

Katie O'Neill: And it, there are not enough voices from minorities and under-represented communities in this whole movement. Like, people just think, "Oh, that's it." You know, and I'm like, perspectives and these barriers that I was talking about affect these minorities and people of color just ... Like, we don't have a grasp ... Like white people do not, can not speak on that.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: Right? And so, what I find in panels all the time is, is just a lot of white people (laughs), and then Barack is there and he's just, he's able to really, like teach us things that we need to know, and it's amazing that he even provides that labor. Like, 'cause he doesn't have to do that, right?

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: And he does. And he's able to really like change perspectives, and really give a voice to communities and not having enough voice. And it's like, "Oh, we wonder how that happens?" Somehow people wonder that. I'm, like, "Can you ... Like, really?" (laughing) Like, all the other (laughs) ... I just can't.

Phil Dallmann: Yeah.

Katie O'Neill: All the other stigmas that are already on these communities. Of course, that's a greater challenge-

Phil Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie O'Neill: ... to speak about disability when there are the implications involved with gender and race and where you live and all of that. And so, those two, Matt, and Barack, who has a physical disability, are just ... Those are the two.

Phil Dallmann: Those are great. (laughing)

Katie O'Neill: Those are the ones.

Phil Dallmann: And those are great folks.

Katie O'Neill: Yeah.

Phil Dallmann: Uh, well, thank you so much. Um, thank you, uh, one for taking the time out to chat.

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: Um, and thank you so much for the work that you're doing. I, uh, it, it nee-, it's just so needed. Um, and, uh, I, I hope all of our listeners, uh, have learned something today, but also, uh, are, are thinking a little bit more about, uh, these different models outside of the medical model that could have a, a tremendous impact for, for individuals out there, uh, navigating mental health. Um, and, and other disabilities as well. Uh, being ... You know, we, uh, we talk a lot on here about finding, finding, uh, finally looking at everyone as a human, um, and if we all look at it as individual humans, you know, um, we'll start moving forward.

Katie O'Neill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Dallmann: Uh, so, thank you so much. And, uh, you are truly an Access Champion.

Katie O'Neill: Mmm. Thank you!

Phil Dallmann: Thanks again to Katie for, uh, taking the time in her, her busy schedule as she's prepping for quite a few things, uh, uh. Uh one, I believe, is the happening, uh, this past weekend, and, and, or this coming weekend, uh, when I'm recording this. Um, and quite a few things in the future, um, as she finishes up her program there. Um, but, uh, what a wonderful surprising conversation, and, and that's why, um, I have a philosophy here of always just saying yes, when it comes to, uh, chatting with folks, 'cause you just never know, um, what amazing conversations could potentially happen. So, again, um, thank you, Katie, for, uh, for taking time to chat, and hopefully we'll chat again in the future, uh, because I think there's amazing, uh, things happening, uh, with her and with her work.

Phil Dallmann: So, um, as always, thank you to our producer, our executive producer, Matt Kerstetter, for making us sound great, each and every single week. Uh, thank you to our associate producer, Ms. Kelsey Rose Brown, for everything that she does in social media, and much, much more. Um, and thank you to Eric Walton for that dope theme song. It never gets old. Uh, we'll be back again, uh, next week, and remember, inclusion believers, never stop running through that brick wall.