>> Shelly Christensen: I am Shelly Christensen, the Senior Director of Faith Inclusion and Belonging at RespectAbility, and the co-founder of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month - JDAIM. I'm really happy to see you here today. I am a white woman with curly brown hair. I'm wearing blue glasses and a burgundy top and a lime green cardigan and a handknit scarf in the same colors. Behind me is a Tiffany-style lamp and photographs of garden flowers. Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel, may his memory be for blessing, was a Jewish Theologian and social justice activist. Dr Heschel marched from Selma, Alabama, to the capital in Montgomery, arm-in-arm with his friend, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He also championed the cause of Soviet Jews, and wondered what kind of God could have permitted the Holocaust. He was a philosopher, and wrote many books, including The Sabbath, where he wrote "creation, we are taught, is not an act that happened once upon a time, once and forever. The act of bringing the world into existence is a continuous process." As we recognize the 15th anniversary of JDAIM, we pause briefly to recognize many inclusive practices that are now part of the Jewish community, and then, in the spirit of all humans created b'tzelem Elohim, in the image of God, we too march on to answer the call to create a world where people with disabilities and those who love us finally feel that they belong to their synagogues, to houses of study, and to the community they choose. Still, to borrow from Rabbi Dr. Heschel, we must allow the process of creation to continue to develop beyond inclusion, until all disabled people who want access to the full scope of Jewish life, are valued, respected, and at last, belong. Please welcome my colleague Lauren Appelbaum.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you so much Shelly, really appreciate that introduction. For those of you who are trying to watch it on Facebook, it looks like there might be an error, so I know it's kind of coming in and out, so we apologize. We will be sharing it on all of our social media platforms this coming week. I am Lauren Appelbaum, RespectAbility's Senior Vice President of Entertainment and News Media. My pronouns are she and her. I'm a white woman with shoulder length brown hair wearing a navy blue shirt. Behind me is a white background -- a white wall and a door. So I come from -- as all of our panelists do, from many intersectional backgrounds. I have undergraduate degrees in urban studies and midrash, which is biblical exegesis, from the Jewish Theological Seminary, as well as a Master's degree in broadcast journalism. And so all these different things that I've kind of studied and become -- my individual. And I also have an acquired non-apparent disability called reflex sympathetic distrophy. Therefore, I have the opportunity to work at the intersection of disability employment and the entertainment industry. I oversee our content advisement work and trainings to ensure authentic representation of disability, as well as building the disability community within the industry through our Entertainment Labs. This work helps increase diverse and authentic representation of disabled individuals on screen, leading to systemic change in how society views and values disabled individuals. This conversation will include several clips from the work of our panelists, and last approximately one hour, and have time for participant Q&A at the end. This Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month, we're happy to celebrate the work of Jewish disabled writers and filmmakers today. I'm going to introduce each of our panelists. Asha is an Emmy-winning filmmaker and two-time Netflix writer and director fellow. Asha is a Jewish, Afro-Latina, and Caribbean Asian female director with disabilities. She disrupts stigmas throughout the entire entertainment industry by creating accessible and inclusive sets for productions and advocating for diverse storytelling. A Yale graduate, former finance professional, and co-founder of Slamdance Unstoppable, which is a film program at the Academy Award and BAFTA-qualifying film festival dedicated to uplifting films with or by disabled talent and filmmakers, Asha impacts positive change beyond just the silver screen. Eden is a writer/director with ADHD and PTSD who has a penchant for crafting cinematic tales about bad people with good hearts. An Israeli with a short stint in the U.S. as an immigrant, Eden insists on remaining an optimistic storyteller with a dark sense of humor. A proud alumnus of both the RespectAbility and 1in4 Labs, Eden is a Jewish family man with Arab roots from Yemen and Libya. Ava is a writer, consultant, actress, speaker, and advocate for disability and autism representation in the entertainment industry. She brings her lived experience to her work as a Chinese transracial Jewish autistic adoptee, creating a professional niche for herself at the intersections of entertainment, storytelling, inclusion, and accessibility. Ava was most recently the autistic creative consultant on the Broadway musical, How to Dance in Ohio, based on the HBO documentary, which follows seven autistic adults. And Ava has also written for PBS Kids shows, including the upcoming Carl The Collector featuring neurodiverse and autistic actors. So Ava, we're gonna start with you. Many folks from underrepresented backgrounds find they end up being the only one in the room, especially when working in the entertainment industry. I know you've encountered this in the past. What advice do you have for others in this situation?

>> Ava Rigelhaupt: Yeah. Hi everyone! This is Ava. First, thank you so much for having me, Lauren and Shelly, and the entire team at RespectAbility. I am a Chinese woman with long black hair and blonde highlights, bangs. I'm wearing a yellow sweater, and behind me is a floor to almost ceiling wall of books. I'm sitting on my couch in the living room. Yeah, so to answer your question, I'll actually start with my advice, which I know is sometimes easier said than done. And I think it's just overall to be confident. As I wrote, kind of fake it till you make it, as they say in the industry. Because you do belong in these spaces and people need to start welcoming more diverse people into Jewish spaces, disability spaces, and the entertainment industry. Obviously I know this is easier said than done. Yeah, because being the only person in a room can sometimes feel othering, or like you don't belong. I definitely think I feel this more as a person of color and an Asian person, although my mom and I knew a handful of Chinese Jewish adoptees when we were living in New York City. And talking to Lauren a while ago, she was like yeah, there's a couple that live in the Maryland DC area. Of course it just depends on where you live. Where I primarily grew up in Columbus, Ohio, not so much. A lot of adoptees, but not as many Chinese Jewish adoptees. So it definitely sometimes has people question whether I'm Jewish or not, and I know we'll go into that a bit more. About being disabled -- often I obviously don't know if I'm the only autistic person in the room. I try not to make assumptions. Autism is often a non-visible disability. And in these instances, depending on where I am and the people and the situation, I sometimes take it as an opportunity to educate people and break stereotypes, just like breaking stereotypes of what a Jewish woman in America looks like. And often sometimes I'm the only -- when I'm hired as an autistic consultant. So I'm obviously there for education. And it's really cool, because they hired me, and most of the time because of that, they listen to me. So they want me there and so it's also, you know, a great area for education. At the same time, as you mentioned How to Dance in Ohio, which I'll talk about more later, it's also great working with other autistic people, like, on these projects, because then we can give different perspectives, and having neurodiverse community within the work.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. Yes, bringing in all of your various identities, which I think -- it can be hard to, like, just say oh, I'm just this, or just that. You know, we are what makes us up, and so you know, Eden, I'd like to kind of come to you next -- so we all identify as Jewish and disabled, but there so many other things that each of us may identify as as well. How do you choose to present yourself, and does it change in different environments?

>> Eden Hadad: Yeah, so thanks Lauren. First of all, super excited to be proud of this, and just be part of this month, honestly. My name is Eden. I wear glasses. I have an open button down shirt. I have a library to my right and a white wall to my left and olive skin. And so it's -- it's a tough nut to figure out, Lauren, because -- and there's so many people here like that --exactly -- that -- for instance, for an up and coming filmmakers or even mid-level filmmakers, you need to constantly introduce yourself in so many places, and like you mentioned, how do you introduce yourself? Like I'm alone, I have so much stuff that shaped the way I tell stories. Either it's growing up as a Jewish Israeli during the second intifada, going to the Army. I never finished high school, so ADHD and dyslexia is part of my identity. And I've been an immigrant in the States for seven years. So how do you even go about it? And you kind of mention it a bit that it's -- it's almost like a dance. You just figure out who's the partner there, and what's the beat that is playing, and then you kind of struggle a bit, but you figure out how to present yourself in the best way that you can, because at the end of the day, presenting yourself is only the first part, and hopefully it opens door for deeper conversations and hopefully for creative conversations. So if you hit some of the marks, I feel like the rest can come later on. But it's always a struggle, and you always feel like you compromise, but that's the dance, I guess.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: It is. I feel like the theme of today will be the dance. [laughs] Asha, how can we embrace all aspects of our identity, especially when working in such a difficult industry?

>> Asha Chai-Chang: That's a wonderful question. First I would like to introduce myself. I am Asha Chai-Chang. I'm a woman of color, because all of the identities I have. And I have purple hair, I'm wearing a green top, and behind me I have my dramatic orange drapes, and the rest of my room with a mirror in the back. And my pronouns are she/her/hers, and I'm based in L.A. So for embracing, I would say that each of our identities really shapes who we -- who we are, and naturally, we're going to always have multiple identities, right? Like, we could be a friend to one person, a stranger to another. You know, daughter, son, like -- you're always going to have different identities. And so I think it's great to -- once you start to really discover yourself, then it's also easier for you to connect with others. I know that's really important for me as a storyteller that I really dive deep into who I am, really think about how I relate to the world, and then think -- then it helps me to think about how would others, right, to be empathetic, and think about how would others relate to something similar, or to the same situation. How do they act differently? And so I feel like once we realize that all of these differences are, whether in perspective or identity is super important, then, like, it's -- it becomes easier to walk into a room and just be like, yeah, this is me, this is who I am, and just standing your truth. So I feel like the reason why I said the reminder about the different identities is just for us to think, you're right, like, we don't -- because everyone wants to box in and try to -- "how do we categorize you?" And I'm like, well, we're going to be multifaceted regardless, so why not really just embrace that from that -- that level, and then from there, be able to present it, and it might be a way to connect with someone or find your community, right, like we are here right now. So yeah, if you want to have that sense of belonging, you have to accept yourself first.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: That's so beautiful, accepting yourself. Ava, I believe you had something you wanted to add?

>> Ava Rigelhaupt: Yeah it's really brief, but I really love what Asha just said -- the last thing about accepting yourself, and then what Eden said about dancing to the beat of whoever you're introducing yourself to. And I just had a couple things to go off of that. Also my pronouns are she/hers -- can't remember if I said that. But yeah, I think what's interesting is that like Eden said, sometimes it feels like a compromise. And I think sometimes it feels like a compromise, and I know you have a question for me about this a little bit, so I won't touch on it 100% now, but I think as Asha said also, and the dancing -- whoever you're introducing yourself to, and be willing to tell them that you're multifaceted, that you have all these intersections that could come into your work and really help the entire room. At the same time, as I always -- as everyone tells me, and I always tell other people, do your research on the person, right? Just how people know, oh man, you realize you both love dogs or speak the same language, another language or something, went to the same Colleg, a common one, right, so I know who I am, but it depends on who I'm talking to. So if, you know, I was just talking to someone who might introduce me to an agent, and that agent is actually more in the DEI space of the company, but for example, if I was talking to an agent for -- who represents actors, you know, I might put on the back burner my writing aspirations, or consulting, or on the, you know, flip side, if I was talking to a writing person, right, or you know, who was looking to get -- staff up people or for a consulting job, it makes them easy, right, because sometimes having a box makes people easy to make the connections, because if you just tell them all this stuff, they're like, "where am I going to put you?" You're so cool but what -- make it easy so when something comes across their desk, like ooh, Ava's an Asian writer, and I just met with her, boom, I'm gonna -- because maybe they get more writing calls, they don't -- they're not in the acting space. So I'm, you know, depending on how the conversation goes, then you can bring up some of your other areas, and I'm learning not to be as fearful of bringing up other areas of myself of what makes sense. But yeah, really just do your research on the person, and learn what they're going to connect to that connects back to you, I think.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Wonderful. You -- everyone, I feel like you're each giving really great advice for anyone who's watching this webinar, whether live or later on a recording, because I think it's difficult, no matter what age anyone is or what stage you are in the industry of -- how do you, you know, present yourself, and such. And Asha, I'd like to come back to you. Have you ever concealed, or do you ever conceal any part of your identity during a job interview?

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Well it's great you say that because Ava just mentioned that great idea -- about that part where you're like, ooh, maybe you don't need to know this right here, or this is -- this is not the right audience for it. And to lean in like that -- to lean into the places where you do connect or how you can be best of service for the job, right? So this actually happened recently, where I do -- production accessibility work, but I'm also a creative, right, I'm also a writer/director. And I had to just lean into being like, you don't really want to know much about the writing/directing I do, okay, well, we're going to have to talk more about accessibility here. And -- or -- and then that's where I did start to reveal more about my disabilities, right? But maybe I may not do that in another job, where someone's like, we want a director for an action film, and I'm like -- I want to do that so bad! And I'm like -- and then -- and I remember actually that happened, someone's like, are you going to tell them about your respiratory disabilities and anxiety? Like, no, this is not -- maybe not right now. Well -- I want them to see the work I've created, really see what I can do first, and then if it -- if it comes up on the job, if we're not able to make -- to have an accessible set, I may make some suggestions then. Yeah, so that that has happened, where I've definitely concealed it then, but it was just, yeah, case by case. But I still -- my thing at the beginning always was like just really know -- because I know for me that's what -- was hard -- I used to conceal it and mask all the time, and, right, because we have non-visible disabilities, and then you wait until you're in a really bad situation, and people are like, why didn't you say something? So that's why I say it's like maybe for the interview I won't, because I want them to focus on my actual talents and my work, and what I can bring to the table and then -- but yeah, so conceal it, but then eventually you're going to have to talk about it and reveal it to -- properly execute the job, or yeah, or maybe it doesn't actually matter, right? Maybe that's all they wanted was to consult with you and so you're like okay -- I can help you in the things you want to know about, and it was good to meet you. We'll connect another way. [laughs] So I would say that. [crosstalk] Examples when it's happened. [laughs]

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Figuring out ways where you're concealing or masking almost always leads to disaster later on, because you're not then going to be able to get the accommodations that you need in order to be able to succeed and be the best writer, director, whatever it is that you're working on at the moment. So I think -- it's something each of you have learned, and I know -- it's something that people -- it takes time for people to learn that -- when you want -- when you feel comfortable being able to disclose different parts of your identity. Ava, when we were chatting yesterday, you you were talking about finding specific spaces where you'd feel comfortable?

>> Ava Rigelhaupt: Yes, and going off of what Asha just said, I think it definitely -- I can't remember the exact instance now, but it kind of was similar of waiting until they want you, right, and then when they want you, when you are hired, or maybe even more in just the finalist phase of different aspects, if you can get that information, then they're probably more willing to make changes and see what can be done because -- and this for me definitely is more about the purposefully concealing or just like not talking -- that I'm autistic, and then when they -- when they want you they are more willing to be accommodating. But sometimes when you know you're like in this huge pool, and they're looking for the -- they're in the elimination process, then maybe I'm more hesitant to give them something easy to eliminate you for, right? Because they'll never say it, because it's technically against the rules, but everyone has -- these preconceived notions, especially of autism and disability and what that means. Obviously I can't hide my race, and recent -- like, being Jewish hasn't come into like -- be hired for stuff, except for my JDAIM speeches, so it's like, oh that's cool, she's Jewish -- like -- whatever. And so I feel like the thing that often is sometimes concealed is the disability, because it definitely is -- you say the word autism and oftentimes when people know what it is, they think of a certain thing, and they might underestimate you and your abilities. So for example, the first thing that came to mind when we were chatting was about auditioning. I know we're mainly here talking about being writers, etcetera, but like, so when sending in self tapes, the main area where I'm hesitant to say is autistic, because I know there's a lot of stigma. Unless, of course, they're asking for disability or a diverse actor, and then of course -- you say that right up front in your slate or sometimes I put my name Ava Xiao-Lin Rigelhaupt because Ava Rigelhaupt doesn't tell them that I'm a non white person, especially in America, they probably would assume until seeing a picture of you. So if you have an inkling that this department is looking for diverse people, I put that at the end of my signature. You know, it just gives them something else that's like -- or if you know -- again research that you're emailing with -- maybe -- you do a little stalking of that person, you figure out that they're an East Asian woman too. Like, better sign that off! And so -- at the same time, you know, when are looking for a disabled actor, I don't hold that back, right? I talk about it or just say it in my slate or in my interview. And since I don't have an agent, I mainly do open calls that sometimes come through like RespectAbility, or other Asian-American organizations that are looking for these diverse people, and that are calls where I feel like I probably could bring more of my full self to. Same for writing and stuff like that, though recently for my writing and consulting, I have been hired because I'm autistic, so that is a little bit more of an area where I do pitch that first more, because people are looking for authentic people to tell those stories.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. And Eden, it looks like you have something you wanted to add?

>> Eden Hadad: No just kind of like Amen to Ava on the fact that -- for me it took a second to realize that what I consider for my childhood, the struggle with my disability, or the fact that, like, we're part of a minority either by being disabled or by being Jewish, and it's almost like, how do you handle it? And even more so today that it feels like society is trying to kind of like, oh snap, we missed -- we didn't really count you folks. And I heard -- and then I from heard from one of the people -- I think honestly in the RespectAbility Lab -- that the people who have so much privilege, and they don't have any -- they're not part of any minority group and they just have everything on a silver spoon -- they use their privilege. So if now, all of a sudden, the fact that I can say all this multi intersectional stuff about me or Ava or Asha, about -- the stuff that makes her her, and we can like -- in your face and this is why you want to talk to us, and this is why we're specific voice -- hell yeah, we should use it, because they've been using it for like more than 100 years, and it's time that we can also kind of -- what about us, folks? Just to add to that.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Yeah -- it's important to be able to kind of see how each of our diversity actually is a positive thing, and not a negative thing, and how -- it can affect us potentially even getting jobs. Like, obviously there's a lot of stigma out there around disability and other items that -- could prevent someone from getting hired, but in other cases as -- Ava previously mentioned -- sometimes -- that is the reason that you get in the room. And then my goal is the reason you stay in the room has nothing to do with -- your identity aspect, but because you're an awesome writer or filmmaker or whatever it might be. Because each of you and so many others are extremely talented individuals, and -- hopefully you'll -- people will be able to just look at your craft and say, oh, I'm hiring you because of your talent and such. But in the way the industry is today -- we all know that that's not always the truth, unfortunately. So Eden, I'd like to stick with you. How does all of this affect and influence your film making? I know when we were chatting earlier this week, you mentioned that, like, your disability in particular, like, has a big influence on your film making.

>> Eden Hadad: No that's -- a fun question, because it took me a minute to figure out how did the two intervene, and then -- and the funny thing is that you learn it after the fact, like, after you written some stuff, after you made some stuff, you're like oh, I have this threadline of all this stuff that connects directly to all the stuff. So for instance -- like, an easy example is with my PTSD. I think I kind of got drawn to the genre film making because there's so much violence there, and being exposed to violence from a young age -- or even -- I just -- there's stuff that -- you Freud yourself and you figure out years later, but -- just recently I figured out that the first movie I ever watched was Goodfellas, which is -- shouldn't happen to a 10 years old, but I was next to my older brother who couldn't care less, and a few weeks after I was alone at the house, and a couple of repo people came when stuff weren't that easy financially in the house, and they were like, I was alone there, we're going to take your TV. And for a 10-11 year old, that's pretty traumatic to see this, to have this kind of experience. And fast forward like 20 years later or so, 15 years later, and -- I'm writing or I'm developing projects that the soul of these repo people are in the characters, and it's kind of like me being therapeutic about it, and being able to mix my love for genre, and take my wounds or whatever you want to call it, and kind of like mix and match them, and go back to what you said, Lauren, about craft -- that's what makes my craft specific, that's what makes Asha's craft or Ava's craft specific. It's like this stuff that shaped us that then we can throw into the bin and create this kind of stuff, so it's kind of fun. It's like, even if I'm not selling this or that, I'm like -- even now I'm developing something for the Israeli television that it's about anti-Semitism on social media, and I'm having so much fun. I'm just like writing and laughing myself, because -- it's a dark comedy, and I'm just taking all the horrendous stuff I see on social media, and then I put it through the filter of this crazy plot and characters, and it's -- so like, you treat yourself while you're in the hustle and the bustle of making stuff, so -- it's kind of -- like a cheat code, it's kind of fun.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: And in about 10 minutes or so, we're actually going to get to see a clip from the short that you mentioned. And -- speaking on, like, dark comedy, I mean, sometimes when you're involved with different things in your childhood and -- growth and such, that is the way to kind of -- cope and get through. And I talk to so many filmmakers and writers who use this medium as a way to cope through some sort of trauma. And such. So it's -- I think it's common, no matter what your religion or background might be, that -- people people find their way -- to work in this industry, because of that. Obviously not everyone, but some. And -- speaking of content -- we've all encountered content that has a variety of tropes in there that would not be so helpful, whether we're talking about from the disability perspective or the Jewish perspective. In both, we find content that depicts disabled and/or Jewish people as, you know, in quotes "not normal," "not the typical person." In both communities, many of us have felt -- you know, not necessarily talking about the four of us present here, but in general -- felt the need to hide identities as either Jewish or disabled or both. And so much more when you're part of multiple communities where you may want to hide something at some point. There is an internalized hate that many people do have, which does contribute to depictions of disabled and Jewish characters as -- not being fully human sometimes. And there's external hate from outside the communities, and a lot of misunderstanding, which leads to inaccurate portrayals. So in an age when many other marginalized groups are kind of proudly leaning into their identity -- why is it difficult for -- those of us who identify as Jewish and/or disabled -- sometimes difficult for us to lean into that -- and such Asha, I'd love to start with you. I'd love your thoughts.

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Wow. Sorry this is -- I had so many thoughts as you were sharing this, and I was like, man, especially about tropes and the idea of being treated almost like you're not -- I said this comment one time when I was at a film -- when I was at an industry event. This is not what I was going to talk about, this is actually something else that came to mind. I remember I stood up and I was like, I was going over -- they're like, oh what's your background? And it was -- there was like a film that we were watching that was intersectional, I remember it was about intersectionalities. And I just was -- I remember sumizing, I'm like, oh, I'm just basically everything America was taught to hate. And they're like, what did you say? I was like I'm just basically -- and I remember repeating it. And the audience was just like [gasps]. I was like well, I mean, I know that. And then I remember like going through -- like, well, I'm Jewish I'm Latina, I'm black -- I'm going through all these -- I'm -- yeah, all of them have -- right? There's these stereotypes. I'm also -- disabled, so here we are. And I remember they're just like -- I remember people at the end were just like, "I have to talk to you about that, because I'm still digesting what you just said." And to follow up with that now, I'll share the story of what -- what we did talk about, which is similar to being in the industry and the idea of -- why can't we proudly speak -- about our Judaism and our faith? And I remember -- so I wear my Chai all the time, and it's hard to see right now but I wear my Chai all the time, right? It's my good luck charm [laughs] -- so to me it's normal, it's an everyday thing, and I didn't think anything of it until I was at an event and someone looked at me and was like, you dare to wear that? I said, pardon? Like -- the Jewish thing -- you wear that? I was like, well, I'm a Jewish woman, so yeah. And same event, someone turned to me and was like, wow, you're actually -- and then, it was like someone else who also was Jewish -- like yes -- I feel like I found my people. Thank you so much for actually just being open and -- being Jewish and proud. And I was like, of course I am. And I'm like -- in my head, like, am I missing something? I'm like, did I not realize I guess in Hollywood that there's this much anti-Semitism? Like, really? And but -- the good thing that came out of it was I was able to find my people, right? I was able to find my people. But the issue I had that I was left with -- the residue, as you would, from the other conversation, someone said you dare to wear that? I'm like -- I just -- I had to sit with it for a while. And I went to a mentor -- because -- you always hear the comment of, oh, Hollywood is run by Jewish people. And I'm like that's funny, because I've been wanting a -- I've been wanting a holiday film [laughs] with us for years. You know -- I'm just thinking -- I would love for more films like that to be at least more mainstream, right? Or even the idea of that, of talking about family being around it. And so we're getting more, I mean, we're seeing some now, thankfully. But it was still -- for us who apparently run the industry, it's been a minute, it's been a while. But yeah, my mentor did say the comment of -- I was -- because he's also Jewish, and I was like -- oh my Latkes came out good, I'm showing him pictures. He's like, don't do that. I'm like what? Why? He's like don't -- he's like, right now -- just ride -- and he tried to say, oh, just ride this wave, or ride that wave. And I'm like, I can't help, it's gonna come through in my writing, and it did -- which we'll talk about that later. But yeah, for a while I remember I was like -- I -- the first time I started to break out and share more about myself, I was met with both, basically. That's what I'm trying to say -- I was met with both the how dare you, and the thank you for being here, and thank you for -- letting people know that we are are here, and that we are human and -- just creating that sense of community there, it's just -- sorry. [laughs] I don't know what to really say right there -- it's just -- it really -- I guess -- no, I know what to say, I know what to say is that I am proud, and if that means that I am being rebellious for just owning who I am, then that's okay [laughs] and you should feel the same. So if you're also Jewish and you're in the industry, like, find your people. Don't worry about people telling you about whether you should or should not be here. I dealt with the same thing when it came to supporting films. I remember this idea of like, if you support Jewish films, that means you -- or even films from -- Israeli films, if you support that, that then means you cannot support other films from other regions. I'm like no, don't do that. Don't -- stop trying to pit us against us -- against each other. Allow for us to have our individuality, and me embracing my identity does not instantly mean I don't like your existence. I hope that -- right, like, I don't like that. I hope that's -- that's the takeaway, do not -- be proud of who you are, but do not then therefore try to hate on others for identifying who they are. So that's that.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I think something else I'm taking away from what you're saying is this idea that you can have compassion for many groups of people at the same time, and you don't need to be this or that. And I think going back to something else that you had said was, you know, the feeling of being told to hide part of your identity, which we kind of touched upon at the beginning of this conversation, and you know, the -- feeling ashamed to be proud of whatever part of your identity at the moment that you might not be so proud of, whether it is dealing with Judaism or your disability or any other identity that each of us hold. And you know, really -- really coming into your own and being able to embrace all parts of yourself. And Ava, you mentioned to me that -- when you're trying to embrace all parts of yourself that people often assume you're not Jewish, but when they find out you are, like, sometimes their opinions of you change, or they don't believe you. Like -- how do you deal with that?

>> Ava Rigelhaupt: Yeah, I'm not quite sure if their opinions of me change. I don't know, I never asked them [indistinct] but I think definitely it's like they don't believe me. And yeah, so speaking about being the only -- I'm often times the only POC in many Jewish spaces, excluding this one that makes an effort to bring in Jews of color. But more or less I've gotten used to it. I just wrote down a stat that I was using for another blog. Like, it is true: Ashkanazi Jews in America are about 68% of the Jews. So Ashkenazi often present as white, so, I mean, my mom's Askanazi. And so most people have never met a Jew of color. And the stat is even higher for North America. So it's reasonable that they assume most Jews are white, because that's dominant representation, and the actual numbers. But obviously, when I say I'm Jewish, I would like people to respect that, and to know that there are like Asian Jews and Jews of color, and Jews of color in other places of the world where they are a little bit less of a minority. And so I think everyone has their own assumption about groups of people, and they probably -- they assume POCs aren't Jewish, and of course people -- it makes it easier for even our brains to put people in boxes -- because that's how we try to figure out the world. If we try to understand everyone's multi-hyphenate identity, it would be really amazing, but also probably really -- information overload to our brains, and we just probably couldn't handle it. That's -- I always joke an animal needs to look at a lion -- a horse needs to look at a lion, be like, yep, that's a lion, I better run -- so that maybe is how we got to our quick assumptions of people. And so they probably -- back to humans -- often probably assume that all POCs -- wrongly assume -- have certain views, maybe even certain views about Jews. And when we add another facet like being Jewish to our identity, it really throws them off and confuses them. Oh, I can't remember if I said this, but yeah, even -- I've been questioned whether I'm Jewish in -- not with RespectAbility, another -- what's it called -- another organization, but in Jewish disability inclusion spaces. And it was just like really ironic. One person thought that I wasn't Jewish, but that they let in a non-Jewish disabled Ambassador to the program. And I was like, nope, I'm Jewish. And so yeah. And the last tidbit is -- I can't speak for Asha or the other person, but I'm assuming people in the room, when Asha was like, I'm everything people in America are taught to hate, were not expecting her to say Jewish. You know, they probably were expecting like black or latina woman, etcetera, but they weren't expecting her to say Jewish, because obviously, most of the time you can't know people's religion from just looking at them, but yeah, that probably really threw them off, and it confuses people and it just -- people like to put people in boxes, and sometimes -- what's it called -- yeah, not want other people to have compassion for someone else's existence, even if they embrace their own identity. It just is the confusing world we live in.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Very much, a confusing world we live in. I think that really sums up a lot what we're talking about. And I'd also like to just remind folks in the audience that if you have questions, please add them to the Q&A box on this platform. And while we're waiting for questions to come in, we're going to get a chance to see clips from each of our three individuals of work that they've been working on. And Eden, I'd like to kind of start with you, and -- we talked about anti-Semitism in the U.S. has really been on the rise -- not just now, but the past few decades -- everyone here is part of a community who might be hated based on part of our humanity and identity, and this really also overlaps with ableism and such, and we all know how important it is to have authentic portrayals on screen. I mean when you get back to some of the goals of RespectAbility' Entertainment and News Media team is to have that authentic, real portrayal on screen, which plays a large role in how the public understands people who are different from them. So I'm curious, how is anti-Semitism and ableism influence your storytelling and if you wouldn't mind also kind of setting up a clip that we'll then show.

>> Eden Hadad: Yeah thanks. That's a great -- that's a great subject to talk about because it just -- it feels like it never going to end, right, it's so depressing. I think our power as storytellers is the fact that we have the creativity and the ambition and -- the weirdness to bring specific characters that can make someone who's -- because so much of racism, not just anti-Semitism, just pure hate, comes from ignorance. And I think the power of going and and bringing in a character that does the -- for instance, I'll give you an example, like Ava mentioned, about the percentage of Jewish Ashkenazi in the States, of my roots -- like you mentioned at the start -- is Yemen and Libya. So in a lot of my writing, my characters really care about food, and really care about hosting, and there's some -- it's almost like Arab mannerism to it, because it's just the roots that I grew up with. And I think the moment that you put it on the screen, it makes those people who are ignorant -- it kind of open another room in their brain and put the question mark there. And I think it hopefully it can lead us to a place of people asking more questions, because right now, everyone don't ask any questions. They just press -- hit "like." But it's -- this kind of stuff -- I always try to -- even tiny moments or whatever it is, that -- to bring for my own life and -- the cool thing about going into genre, going into the comedies, and thrillers, and stuff that are more mainstream -- I believe that it can allow -- it can get to more audiences, because there's so many amazing biopic films and projects that sometimes they stay -- although they're amazing, they don't really go to mainstream. And so one of the things that I'm at least aspiring to do with my work is to get to mainstream, because--. oh I want to see -- we're going to talk about the clip in a second -- I want to see this film about -- this dark comedy about these two body disposals for a crime organization, and while you watch it, you're like, oh I never seen these specific characters. Oh, I never -- these specific characters that are also Jewish or Arab or -- that they're like -- or they have disabilities. So kind of like prepping for the clip that -- I would love to share with everyone is -- so my short film that now I'm also developing it for a bigger thing, it's the story -- basically it's about two body disposers at the age of like 60s 70s, they're past their peak in the crime world -- and they're -- basically their job is just to dispose bodies, that's all they do. That's why it's called the disposers, that -- they're the disposers. And the hook of the film, at least, is that one of them is about to head out and take an early retirement without -- notifying his boss He doesn't know that his partner for the past -- 50 years got an assignment to kill him before he even leaves. And so you get this -- bromance, dark comedy thriller. And the clip that I'll share now -- so there's a ritual that they do, and every time they bury someone, they do their own version of a Kadish, of the mourner's prayer. And for anyone who doesn't know what's a Kadish -- I hope some people don't know what's a Kadish, because it's not a fun thing to know. And so in the clip, I just basically took the way I grew up with my dad and how he would do the kiddush -- my dad on the kiddush, on the Shabbat dinner, he'll hold the cup and he'll be like [speaking fast in Hebrew] -- because he read it so many times. So I just like -- what if I'll bring this kind of prayer for my dad and put it in this kind of film, in this kind of moment, and it just adds another specific color to a genre that we've seen so many times, and characters we've seen, but there's something fresh about it. So that's I think kind of a context for -- watching the clip now.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Now Eden, you're making this into a feature film as well. In one minute or less, can you share a little bit more, especially -- what what you're able to add to these characters?

>> Eden Hadad: Once you go to a feature you can really expand on the story and the character. So something fun that I doing now with the feature version is that one of them gonna sharing with me my ADHD and he has intense ADHD, and he can't really control himself in a way. And the other one has PTSD. And it's -- I feel -- it's like a privilege to be able -- going back to stuff we talked about -- to -- again, show these character and -- bleed your own disability into it. I think it makes it more original for the audience, and it also makes for better characters while you're really write -- write what you know, as they say. And so that's one of the things that I'm adding to the feature version.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I love how you're developing even more character -- and that they're becoming even more three-dimensional characters, which is something we always talk about and such. And alright, Asha, I wanted to come over to you. I know you're also working on -- so we're going from dark comedy to -- preschool and comedy, so completely different genres here. So I know you're currently creating a preschool animated Spanish bilingual TV series, Wendy on Wheels, which we had the chance to workshop with you during our RespectAbility Children's Content Lab in 2022, and recently created a trilingual Spanish, English, and ASL sitcom proof of concept and film Marque Dos, which just premiered at an Academy Award qualifying Film Festival, so congrats. So can you please share more and then set up the clip that you want to share?

>> Asha Chai-Chang: For sure. And Eden, that was awesome. [laughs] I just want to say that. I enjoyed it, I was like, yes, okay. But yes -- so for Marque Dos, I definitely do more family and -- family and children content. That's my happy space, but I still love comedy, always have appreciation for it. And so Marque Dos is just a story about -- to be honest, the original log line was about the time when I actually wanted to stop speaking Spanish, because I wanted to fit into one box. But then my mom at home, who is multilingual, was like, what do you mean? Like what do you mean you're gonna like -- I was like -- I'm done! I'm kind of dramatic, I'm not sure if anyone knows that about me, but I'm very dramatic, and that was really how I felt. I was like, that's it, I'm never doing it again. And after having an experience working in -- the marketing world, and that's pretty much what Marque Dos is about. It's -- it's about a young woman working in the marketing industry -- and this is all the trouble she deals with -- during the job, and being left with that idea of feeling so drained that she couldn't fit into one box or the other that she's like maybe I'll just have to give up a part of myself. And yeah, so this is a trailer. Just kind of talks about that, and hope you guys enjoy it because the film is fun! [laughs]

>> Lauren Appelbaum: So congrats again on it being at a Academy Award qualifying film festival, and I know that you're going to be hitting the short film circuit -- the film festival circuit with it, and so, exciting to see what you'll kind of be doing with it. Ava, would like to come back -- come over to you, who also is kind of more in the children and family space right now, but I know you're also looking to kind of do more in kind of the adult space, so looking to see where you'll end up there. So last week, I've -- gotten to embrace a bunch of your things most recently. So last week I was at Kidscreen, and I had the opportunity to meet the creator of Carl The Collector, which you're writing for. And then I was able to come over to New York City to see the "How to Dance in Ohio" for it's last weekend on Broadway. And so you're -- you've been having this opportunity to really work on a lot of these authentically autistic projects. What do you want it -- what do you want people to know about these projects?

>> Ava Rigelhaupt: Yeah. I will talk briefly about them and then I can go in a bit more depth after the clip. So as you said, I'm a writer for Carl The Collector, which is also a kids animated TV series for ages about three to six years old -- seven. And it will be released in the fall. The characters are all animals, so Carl, the main character, is a raccoon. He's also autistic. His friend Lotta is a fox who's also an autistic young girl. And I got the job through someone else at the musical who heard that they were looking for autistic writers. And it's my first big TV writing job besides a couple co-writing things with 9 Story Media Productions. That's also a kids -- production house. And it's a great team, and I'm really excited that my first writing job helps young children understand autism in a more funny and entertaining way. So -- speaking of fun and entertaining ways to push some disability representation in entertainment, the musical "How to Dance in Ohio" is also really exciting. And I'm the autistic creative consultant on it. And the show follows seven autistic young adults and their psychologist, Dr. Amigo, at a social skills center in Columbus, Ohio, as they come of age, form connections, and prepare for a spring dance. It's authentically cast, so 12 artistic actors are making their Broadway debuts, along with other autistic and neurodiverse artists offstage that made their Broadway debuts, including myself. Lauren rushed over to see it, because unfortunately, it just closed on Broadway February 11th. But we hope that there is a future for it sometime, and actually -- I'll put in the chat -- well, depending -- the original Broadway cast recording is streaming on all music streamers.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: So we are coming up on the last few minutes, so I'm gonna -- start with Ava, because I know you mentioned that you wanted to share a little bit more about Ohio -- I'm going to give each of you -- a minute for kind of closing thoughts, and also wanted to share a question from Amanda Boer, who -- saying thank you all for joining, and wants to know how you felt supported by Jewish or disability communities. So if there's anything there that you would like to add, but Ava, I will start with you.

>> Ava Rigelhaupt: Yeah, I'll keep my answers shorter. And so, just to make it clear -- so all the people -- the young adults sitting in the red chairs were our autistic lead actors. And so as a consultant, as one person put it, I wear many hats. And my role has evolved since 2021 when I joined the team. I work across -- teams to ensure a culture of accessibility and inclusion in everything that we do, both internally and public facing. So it started with working with the writers on authentic autistic characters that are -- that work is really similar to my work in TV and film. I also forgot to mention that it is based on Alexander Shiva's HBO Peabody award winning documentary of the same name. So we melded the characters of the real people from the real Doctor Amigo and his Counseling Center with our actors and a fictionalized show on stage. In addition, we worked with the actors and the crew as our teams evolved on making accessible rehearsal spaces, and asking, like, what do you need to do your best work? We have an access need survey that we sent out to everyone, regardless of whether they are Autistic or not. And it asked questions like that. Actually, it was just made public, so I can drop in the chat later. And I also helped them work on a press language guide for terms that our show prefers and why, such as -- identity first, autistic person, versus person first, person with autism. And just like any show, we of course wanted all of our teams and co-producers to present a unified front and explain the show in the same manner, but especially because the musical highlights the autistic community which is often marginalized, misunderstood, and Ill represented. And so also, lastly, I worked on public facing stuff that has to do with outreach to organizations like RespectAbility to spread the word, and audience accessibility, like cool down spaces -- we have two -- we had two cooldown spaces in the Belasco, a know before you go guide, and a sensory friendly advisory list. But our show has been formed with access at the forefront instead of access as an afterthought, or as we say, it's not just about being invited to the party, it's being asked to dance. So it's really extraordinary, and across the world people have come to see it, and people really feel seen because as you could see possibly from the clip, our show highlights the joys and successes of the autistic community. As Ashley Will -- one actress said -- it's not in spite of being autistic that our characters and even our real actors have succeeded, it's a yes and. It's also a fun call back to acting and improv rules. So you know, it's a joyous representation that is often a contrast to many of the representation that focuses on the struggles. Yeah, our musical shows that too. As one person said it's real, and it's authentic.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. Asha, if we can ask you to keep to 30 seconds and then Eden, I'll throw it to you. [laughs]

>> Asha Chai-Chang: So there's also a question I remember. So okay -- so I would say that after pretty much identifying community here, right, with my -- with my fellow Jewish friends, yeah, whether they be filmmakers, or people who are just supportive of the arts -- I feel like organizations have helped me to -- to stay connected, and then we support each other at screenings, and then whether -- even for writing and kind of sharing our -- scripts with one another. So there is definitely been support when it comes to Jewish community for sure. I just want to say that -- that I am grateful for that and that is definitely here, and I hope to continue to champion that. Now for some more notes for Marque Dos, or the English title is Second Chance for it, I just wanted to also say something that I was really proud of is that we were able to authentically cast and and you didn't get to see that in the clip, but authentically cast -- the mom is actually disabled, neurodiverse as well as a cane user. We had a director of ASL. We had ASL interpreters that were also from different backgrounds on our set. And a accessibility coordinator there. So I really want to say, like, that's something else that's really proud -- that you don't get to see on -- in the film, but behind the scenes we definitely made sure that we use a fully accessible set. Our art director is also a wheelchair user. Like, we honestly -- you know what I mean -- the whole -- we're representing everybody -- when it came to our set. So that's something to also note about the back story from Marque Dos, as well, it is funded by the Netflix creative fund for equity, and supported by the Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival. So I did want to put that out there, just to know the background of how the inclusion fellowship came. And now to Eden. [laughs] I want to know about you!

>> Eden Hadad: No honestly, Asha, I want to just go back to what you said again of -- and I'm saying it even more so from Israel these days, that -- the sense of the community it's -- I said it to Lauren a few days ago that -- it doesn't feel like a 15/12 hours flight, like with everything that's happening now, I think if I can say anything closing thoughts is -- boy, I'm so happy for our community, and I feel like we should stick together and we should reach out to each other and feel comfortable to reach out to each other, because that's our superpowers. And so yeah that's kind of -- I honestly because -- I'm kind of influenced by everything that's happening now. And so that's like my biggest thing that I would like to just add to what Asha already said, that that community, it's something so essential and amazing, and we need it, we need each other.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. That's a wonderful thing to end on -- needing our community and each other. In the chat, there is a link for upcoming events. We do a bunch of different events, so wanted to remind people our next virtual event for JDAIM is going to be a private sneak peek and conversation of a new short film called THIRTEEN, and we also have a few other disability related -- events that are coming up virtually, as well some in person. So if you click on the link that Eric just put in the chat, you can learn all the details, figure out how you can sign up, and I want to thank everyone for sticking with us for a few extra minutes as we wrapped up, and a huge thank you to Asha, Eden, and Ava. It was really an enlightening conversation, and I hope one that everyone watching could learn from. And look forward to seeing and sharing all the content you're working on now and in the future. Thank you everyone!