Envisioning More Accessible Mediums of Designing Accessible Technology

As accessibility research is starting to broaden its reach, one of the spaces that people with disabilities are under-represented is within technology design and research itself. Access to design training for people with disabilities is often lacking. Professional designers are incentivized to neglect accessibility issues, experiences of people with disabilities and access needs the technology might require. Design curriculum and education is also falling significantly behind in addressing or teaching these perspectives.

Industry leading companies have increasingly put a spotlight on accessibility through inclusive design toolkits and guidelines over the years. These might highlight some token product features that can improve experiences for people with varying abilities but doesn't consistently translate into success for many disabled users of technology. While these efforts have created micro-levels of awareness amongst teams, there is little advancement of supporting people with disabilities in these roles or encouraging practitioners to put "accessibility" into practice within daily design decisions. Exploring alternate forms and ways to design can help scale accessibility in a more effective manner and empower people with disabilities to have a more proactive role in designing mainstream technology.

There is a stark underrepresentation of disabled designers in key design roles, to be able to lead with their lived perspectives and experiences in creating more inclusive interactions within features of technology. Traditional notions of design as dominantly artistic and visual dictates design systems and how they inform technology development. This inherently excludes people who interact with the world and technology through different mediums.

Much insight is lost in translation when non-disabled designers try to represent what they have learned or from disabled users' experiences. This can end up transposing inherent biases and incorrect assumptions onto design choices. There is a mismatch in the mental models of both non-disabled design practitioners and disabled users when attempting to collaborate. The absence of more accessible mediums of design and design tools has created a bigger barrier for disabled folks to provide valuable contributions in the technology design process and be seen as design experts.

Current design tools lack ways of prototyping accessible input modalities and feedback. In order to establish more equitable methods and mediums of design, people with diverse disabilities need to contribute equally to the product design process. We must consider other ways of "designing" interaction, user experiences, and UI that better supports their ideation. More inclusive design tools will allow people with diverse abilities and interaction preferences to carry more agency and accurate representation of their mental model in everyday technology design.