

unseen Discussion Guide

A film by Set Hernandez

FILM SUMMARY

unseen documents fragments of Pedro's life as a Mexican migrant living in the United States, focusing primarily on his experiences at the intersection of disability, race, and citizenship status. As he celebrates the family ties, friendships, and acts of interdependence that sustain him, Pedro reflects on the significance of his achievements as a disabled person pressured to prove himself "worthy." The film candidly depicts the social pressures and normative expectations disabled Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) encounter in their day-to-day lives, in addition to the constant terror and uncertainty undocumented migrants endure, which often lead to internalized ableism and emotional and psychological distress.

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE: ¡Nada Sobre Nosotros Sin Nosotros!

Through compelling first-hand storytelling, *unseen* delivers an immersive cinematic experience, capturing the essence of disability justice principles and practices, such as intersectionality and interdependence, as well as disability studies concepts and

imagery, such as the supercrip myth and the bodymind concept. This guide is an invitation to reflect on some of those elements while considering the social and political context (race, class, gender, disability, and sexuality, among others) that create one's identity, and what these allow us to unpack, unlearn, and better understand about minoritized experiences—this time through their own narratives and *testimonios*. As the community motto says, *¡Nada sobre nosotros sin nosotros!*, or Nothing about us without us!

Facilitation Agreements: Critical and Black feminist pedagogy strategies

Brazilian philosopher and social theorist Paulo Freire, the father of critical education, argued that production and oppression under capitalism are maintained through dehumanizing and alienating practices. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he explains that traditional, or “transference,” education models are weapons used to cement this power structure, and disproportionately impact historically marginalized communities. He refers to the unexamined and uncritical transmission and consumption of biased concepts and filtered facts as the “banking model of education.” Freire’s proposal for a liberatory education is based on the practice of conscientization (*conscientização*), which entails developing a critical consciousness through deep analysis of one’s social location and the political, economic, and cultural forces that create and perpetuate injustice. Freire conceived conscientization as a complex, multi-layered process involving self-reflection, critical analysis, agency, determination, and direct action.

Critical pedagogy principles continue to inform and influence curriculum design and teaching practices today. Emphasis on critical thinking and self-directed inquiry models such as the Montessori and Waldorf methods and cooperative learning strategies that challenge neoliberal education policies have played a significant role in shaping contemporary educational praxis; praxis refers to processes that involve knowing, doing, reflecting, re-evaluating, and acting. These strategies have prompted a re-evaluation of traditional classroom roles and identity hierarchies and challenged power relations that divide educator/student relationships.

An example of this subversive approach is evident in feminist pedagogy practices, which emphasize the shift away from traditional banking models that position educators as bestowers of knowledge and students as passive receivers' and toward knowledge created collaboratively in the classroom. Feminist pedagogy scholars propose that traditional education models are largely rooted in cisheteropatriarchal values that

construct women as empty vessels to whom knowledge is imparted, often benefitting the political and economic interests of the male dominant classes. As Black feminist legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw states in her theory of intersectionality, systems of domination often overlap, magnifying oppression. In *Teaching to Transgress*, Black theorist and educator bell hooks analyzed cisheteropatriarchal modes of control and their function within overlapping systems of oppression, focusing primarily on oppositional strategies emerging within education as a liberatory practice. In *Black Feminist Thought*, social theorist Patricia Hill Collins curated a collection of these works along with critical commentary on the political work of Black feminists of her time, including Crenshaw, hooks, and Angela Davis. She aimed to make revolutionary concepts such as “the matrix of domination,” a phrase she coined to explain the impact of interlocking systems of oppression on Black women, accessible to audiences beyond academia.

hooks, like Freire, believed that traditional education was designed as a system of indoctrination into the ideology of whiteness and a buy-in to the capitalist forces that reinforce its foundations. She understood “marginality as a site of resistance” and advocated a liberatory curriculum designed to center the experiences of those most marginalized by intersecting systems of oppression. hooks’s interventions in this context aimed to foster a grassroots knowledge base across the curriculum. Rather than integrating stories about oppressed communities, hooks highlighted the importance of working in solidarity with oppressed communities and centering their own narratives. To that end, hooks located the source of liberatory knowledge in the “beloved community” and relied on the power of collaborative meaning-making as an antidote to racialized, gendered, and epistemic injustice.¹ Epistemic means all that is related to the production of knowledge.

Facilitation agreements are a common strategy used by critical feminist educators to cultivate beloved learning communities that invite complex, though generative, conversations about the most pressing global issues, including anti-Black racism, systemic ableism, climate change, mass incarceration, sexual violence, transphobia, and sanctioned genocide. As opposed to rules, which are set and imposed by one person or authority figure (i.e., a teacher, an institution, or a government body), these agreements are based on the foundation of a democratic society and center around consensus as a tool for collaborative decision-making and equitable participation.

¹ “Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.”

— bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*

Agreements are internally motivated and thus encourage open dialogue, a shift in perception, and, ultimately, direct action. On the contrary, rules are externally motivated and often disrupt critical thinking, equitable participation, and transformative engagement.

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USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and is designed for people who want to use *unseen* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening

actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning the next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

TIPS AND TOOLS FOR FACILITATORS

Here are some supports to help you prepare for facilitating a conversation that inspires curiosity, connection, critical questions, recognition of difference, power, and possibility.

Share Community Agreements

Community Agreements: What Are They? Why Are They Useful?

Community agreements help provide a framework for engaging in dialogue that establishes a shared sense of intention ahead of participating in discussion. Community agreements can be co-constructed and created as an opening activity that your group completes collectively and collaboratively. [Here is a model](#) of community agreements you can review.

Opening Activity (Optional): Establishing Community Agreements for Discussion

Whether you are a group of people coming together once for this screening and discussion or a group whose members know each other well, creating a set of community agreements helps foster clear discussion in a manner that draws in and respects all participants, especially when tackling intimate or complex conversations around identity. These steps will help provide guidelines for the process:

- Pass around sample community agreements and take time to read aloud as a group to make sure all participants can access the text.
- Allow time for clarifying questions, make sure all participants understand the necessity for the agreements and allow time to make sure everyone understands the agreements themselves.
- Go around in a circle and have every participant name an agreement they would like to include. Chart this in front of the room where all can see.
- Go around two to three times to give participants multiple chances to contribute and also to give a conclusive end to the process.
- Read the list aloud.
- Invite questions or revisions.
- Ask if all are satisfied with the list.

PARTICIPANTS

Pedro, Protagonist, Co-Writer: Pedro is a social worker who is devoted to providing vision rehabilitation and mental health services for marginalized groups. He is a blind undocumented immigrant himself, so the intersectionality between immigration, blindness, and mental health has been a constant in his life. With the support of his family and community, Pedro has learned to embrace his identities, using them to empower others to face adversity. Pedro has volunteered his time to promote higher education to undocumented students, as he is a firm believer that knowledge is the key to upward mobility. Aside from his profession, Pedro is also a triathlon enthusiast. It is an activity that grounds him and connects him with his higher self. Since his personal life is as important to him as his professional life, Pedro enjoys spending time with his family and close friends. Their love motivates him to keep moving forward.

Set, Director, Producer, Cinematographer, Writer, Co-Editor: Set Hernandez (they/she/he) is a filmmaker and community organizer whose roots come from Bicol, Philippines. As a queer, undocumented immigrant, they dedicate their filmmaking to expand the portrayal of their community on screen. Their feature documentary debut, *unseen*, received an Independent Spirit Award and was shortlisted for Best Feature at the IDA Documentary Awards. Set's past documentary work includes the award-winning short *COVER/AGE* (2019) and impact producing for *Call Her Ganda* (2018). An alumnus of the Disruptors Fellowship, Set is also developing both a TV comedy pilot and a feature-length screenplay. Since 2010, Set has been organizing around migrant justice issues, from deportation defense to healthcare access. They co-founded the Undocumented Filmmakers Collective, which promotes equity for undocumented immigrants in the film industry. Set's work has been supported by the Sundance Institute, NBCUniversal, the Gotham Film and Media Institute, and Field of Vision, among others. In their past life, Set was a published linguistics researcher, focusing on the area of bilingualism. Above all, Set is the fruit of their family's love and their community's generosity.

KEY ISSUES

unseen is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Intersectionality and identity-making (disability, race, and migration)
- Overcoming and the Supercrip Myth
- Embodied reality and cultural and political dimensions of disability
- Resilience through interdependence: family and community
- Queercrip aesthetic and the normalcy narrative

COMMON CONCEPTS AND LANGUAGE

Access Intimacy – Disability and transformative justice activist Mia Mingus coined this term in her blog [Leaving Evidence](#). She defines it as “the elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else “gets” your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level. Sometimes it can happen with complete strangers, disabled or not, or sometimes it can be built over the years.”

American Dream – The pursuit of a better, more prosperous, and productive economic life is a narrative built on a neoliberal archetype of success deeply intertwined with systems of white supremacy and settler colonialism.

Bodymind – Disability studies scholar Margaret Price popularized this term to describe how, rather than functioning independently, the body and mind have a symbiotic relationship. This term troubles medical narratives and practices that treat disability as something that can be “fixed” or otherwise removed—as autism is often framed by medical and therapeutic communities.

Cripistemology – Ancestral wisdom and knowledge produced across disability communities by and for disabled people’s survival under late-stage capitalism, and the documentation and celebration of artistic production and disability cultural practices. Late-stage capitalism describes a society increasingly controlled, governed, and destroyed by corporations.

Disability Justice – A popular movement born in the early 2000s, spearheaded by a troupe of disabled BIPOC performance artists, [Sins Invalid](#). Ten principles, based on anti-capitalist organizing, guide the work of disability justice practitioners toward collective liberation while centering the experiences of poor, queer, trans, and non-binary BIPOC. Among the ten principles are intersectionality, cross-movement solidarity, and interdependence.

Foreign Interventionism – The imperialist practices that meddle in the political, economic, military, and governmental affairs of other nations as they pertain to the realm of international relations.

Interdependence – A practice of interrelational living that interrupts the neoliberal principles of independence and individualism. Interdependence bolsters collaboration and solidarity to challenge capitalist principles, which are used to both exploit and exclude those marked as “burdensome” to the state, the community, and their families.

Internalized Ableism – Feelings of unworthiness resulting from constantly interacting with external negative messaging, imagery, and attitudes about disability, as well as continuous discrimination by non-disabled peers and social institutions based on one’s disability.

Intersectionality – In her theory of intersectionality, legal scholar and theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw states that systems of domination such as racism, sexism, ableism, and classism typically overlap, magnifying oppression.

Neoliberalism – A political and economic philosophy that advocates a hands-off approach to government. Neoliberalism promotes changing economic policies, such as reducing government involvement with private business, opening free trade between nations without any oversight, and making public resources privately operated and often inaccessible. It spreads an ideology around consumerism, seeking to create an “ideal”—i.e., independent, non-disabled, middle-class, white, cisheterosexual, and male—workforce.

Queercrip – An alternative expression of being, knowing, experiencing, navigating, and embodying the world that is socially marked as excessive (i.e., freakish, out-of-place). This expression of excess functions as a political tool of liberation, troubling and pushing the narrative of normalcy beyond its limits.

Supercrip Myth – This concept highlights the assumptions and societal pressures imposed on disabled people to conform to normative standards of appearance and capacity. These standards compel disabled people to overcome their disabilities and achieve a manufactured idea of belonging and success, often at the expense of their own identities and overall wellbeing. This narrative of overcoming stems from a belief that certain bodyminds are superior to others; this belief is deeply rooted in systems of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and capitalism. Social groups that actively challenge these dominant systems and celebrate alternative ways of navigating and

being in the world are perceived as threats to the status quo and, as a result, are exiled, confined, forcefully removed, committed, incarcerated, institutionalized, and otherwise excluded.

Testimonio – A feminist methodology emerging from LatCrit (Latin American Studies) used to expose, unpack, and resist systematic abuse and violence perpetrated against historically marginalized communities. Testimonio draws on the power of lived experience and situated knowledge to theorize injustice through the lens of those most impacted by the social, economic, and political forces that sustain it.

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LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

unseen started off as one kind of documentary. It was going to be an observational portrait about my friend Pedro and his experience being a blind, undocumented immigrant. With my background in advocacy, we were going to use the film to revolutionize the discourse around immigration and disability. What I didn't realize was that it would take seven years to complete this project. Along the way, the film would change its course—and so would we as people, both Pedro and I.

I was a 23-year-old community organizer just six months into my job when I first met Pedro in 2015. He was part of a program for undocumented young adults that I helped to run. At the time, I was young and idealistic. I thought that by serving my community, I could help make a difference. But looking back now, I see that maybe I was just seeking ways to feel needed.

Don't get me wrong: My belief in community organizing to change society has always been the biggest reason I've been involved in advocacy. Through the years, however, I've come to realize that maybe there was another side to it. As an undocumented immigrant, I internalized the notion that I had to earn my right to be part of the country I call home and had to prove that I am worthy of dignity

and love. Otherwise, I feared that society would throw me away.

When I first started filming with Pedro, I wasn't aware of these things. That lack of self-awareness prevented me from fully understanding Pedro and his story. I would spend hours with Pedro, following him with my camera as a one-person filmmaking team. But when a shoot had wrapped, I would come home to deal with my demons in solitude. Little did I know that Pedro was grappling with his own demons, too. Pedro would tell me about his mental health struggles, but until I became aware of my own inner darkness, I didn't understand what he was talking about.

Too often, films about "marginalized" communities (whether undocumented immigrants or people with disabilities) focus solely on the sociopolitical oppression we experience. I must admit: this was also the approach that I originally planned to use to film Pedro. I was framing his story only through the lens of his undocumented-ness and disability. But doing so would have reduced my friend to the "social issues" affecting his life, instead of uplifting his full humanity. Doing so also would have neglected Pedro's agency in this film and the ways his friendship has changed me. I'm glad life intervened so that this film could be shaped into the film it was meant to become.

Beyond Pedro's story onscreen, *unseen* has become a film about the things we often don't show others and the things we eventually reveal. It's a film that lifts the veil for audiences to watch its own ever-evolving creation. The behind-the-scenes footage we could have easily cast aside ultimately conveys the most consequential moments of the film, and shows how Pedro and I grew because of them. In other words, it's a film about being vulnerable.

As we prepared to premiere, I had to watch this film two to three times per week for finishing touches. Each time, I marveled at how different this film has become from the one I conceived with Pedro all those years ago. Each time, I am overwhelmed by Pedro's trust. I'm a first-time feature filmmaker who did not have all the resources to make this film, but somehow, Pedro kept on letting me into his life. I never imagined that my friendship with him would turn into what it is now. I also never imagined that we would meet the loving community of collaborators who brought this film to life and without whom this film would not be possible.

Then again, I've never had any luck in anticipating what the future holds.

The idealist in me still hopes that *unseen* can contribute meaningfully to advancing the immigrant and disability justice movements. (That's why we have an impact campaign for the film!) For now, what I do know is that this film and being Pedro's friend have touched my life forever. I'm honored that Pedro and many on our filmmaking team have found solace in this film as well. Maybe that, in itself, is a form of impact.

Set Hernandez

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sociopolitical and Economic Background: Neoliberal Expansion and U.S. Immigration Policy in the 1980s and 1990s

U.S. foreign interventionism and development practices have been key to shaping migration in Latin America. In the twentieth century, the growing interconnectedness of global free market economies and the expansion of U.S. neoliberal policymaking greatly influenced the socioeconomic and political landscape of the region. In the 1980s, arbitrary free trade standards and regulations imposed by international development organizations, such as the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the World Trade Organization weakened Latin American economies, rendering them more susceptible to government spending cuts and tax increases and thus reliant on the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This unrelenting economic instability and systematic neglect of the rights of the working class and impoverished resulted in widespread societal unrest. Through the 1990s, significant increases in debt, unemployment rates, currency devaluation, and a general decline in living conditions ushered in an influx of poor and working-class migrants from numerous Latin American countries to the United States.

Historically, U.S. migration policy has been particularly harsh toward Latin Americans, with some exceptions made for migrants fleeing leftist regimes, such as Cubans and Nicaraguans. Untenable circumstances throughout Central and South America, however, have forced people to leave their countries in growing numbers, with a staggering 12 million unauthorized migrants in the United States between 1990 and 2006.

To deter and address unauthorized entry, Congress has implemented severe measures, such as the passing of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which have served to enhance border security surveillance systems, criminalize illicit hiring practices, and secure expedited removal. Nevertheless, the migrant Latinx population has almost doubled since the 1990s, with 60% originating from Mexico. Many of those who have left their countries in search of a better life and more opportunities to care for their families risk their lives to enter and remain in the United States while living precariously as undocumented migrants. Such is the case of Pedro and his family, as well as Set and other participants in the film.

Disinvestment in the Public Sector: Disability Service Precarity Pre- and Post-United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

In addition to the global expansion of free markets and arbitrary trade standards, neoliberal policy reform has reduced state support of social programs, implemented cuts to public spending, and driven the privatization of social services and goods, such as health care and education. Systematic disinvestment in the Latin American public sector has had particularly negative consequences for historically marginalized communities facing stigma and inequitable policies and practices, primarily disabled, poor, queer, trans, non-binary, Black, and Indigenous people. How have these socioeconomic systems and political structures impacted disabled Mexicans like Pedro?

According to data gathered in a report from the U.N. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities issued in 2014, Mexico introduced its first general law for persons with disabilities in 2005 and then ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007. Even after the passage of the legislation, the report suggests that

In 2010 7.7 million people in Mexico had a disability. Out of that number, 5.7 million lacked social insurance, 3.8 million lagged behind in education, 1.3 million lacked access to health services, 0.8 million lacked decent living space, 1.7 million did not have the basic living means, and 2.2 million lacked access to food.

The above data confirms that public disability service resources in Mexico before 2005 were precarious at best and fully lacking at worst. Because of this, poor and working-class families with disabled children had limited to no options to provide for their needs and overall wellbeing. As a result, families like Pedro's were forced to leave behind their loved ones, their land, and their culture to pursue better opportunities abroad. Historically, both the geographical proximity and allure of the American dream have made the United States a common destination for Mexican people looking to better their living conditions and access to education, health care, and gainful employment.

However, the film artfully shows that the pursuit of the American dream is a fraught endeavor insofar as that dream promises an ideal life to highly independent individuals—that is, those who manage to pull themselves up by their metaphorical bootstraps. Yet, as Pedro's story shows, this ideal life is permanently out of reach for

those who do not conform to the archetypal image of the “good” citizen-consumer—meaning a white, middle-class, non-disabled, cisheterosexual, male.

Disability Justice and Care Work: A Roadmap to Collective Liberation

Disabled people’s social movements in the United States have followed two main political trajectories: 1) a rights- and litigation-based movement and 2) a justice-oriented grassroots movement.

Ushered in by the parent movement in the 1950s, the disability rights movement (DRM) emerged in the late 1960s. It benefited from societal shifts and great potential for long-term change and aimed to enhance disabled people’s living standards and full participation in society. The DRM launched an identity politics campaign fighting for previously withheld access to human and civil rights. Following a long history of abuse, confinement, and neglect, the DRM represented a beacon of hope for disabled people. However, the DRM focused on ensuring disability-specific protections and enacting new laws disconnected from those most affected by overlapping systems of oppression—that is, poor, queer, trans, and non-binary BIPOC, who comprise the largest portion of the disability community in the United States.

The disability justice movement (DJM) emerged in the early 2000s. It was spearheaded by a group of disabled BIPOC artists based in the Bay Area—a troupe of performance artists named Sins Invalid. Their lived experiences at the intersections of disability, poverty, queerness, and other marginalized identities, along with their artistic productions, have inspired an unprecedented revolutionary movement. The rise of the DJM sparked the creation of care networks and alternative ways of being and living that challenge traditional kinship systems and foster new ways of understanding and relating to one another and the world. In addition, the movement has effectively mobilized historically marginalized communities toward collective liberation by implementing strategies such as intersectional politics, cross-movement organizing, and the application of anti-capitalist principles. In general, emphasis on grassroots leadership and community-building strategies—such as care work, access as an expression of love, and the cultivation of artistic and cultural practice—has significantly contributed to advancing equitable and sustainable social transformation.

The DRM has focused on developing and securing connections with governmental, legislative, and policymaking stakeholders to gain and enforce equal access to health care, transportation, education, and employment, among other civil rights. Sins Invalid reports that this political strategy has been partially achieved through “the establishment of a disability bureaucratic sector” and an extensive network of

“advocacy organizations, service provision agencies, constituency-led centers, membership-based national organizations, as well as cultural and academic spaces.”

Following centuries of human rights abuses, including inhumane living conditions, torturous “treatments,” and neglect in almshouses, asylums, and medical institutions, the DRM was critical to the protest movements of the 1960s, primarily in securing legal protections for disabled people within a rights-based recognition framework. Some of the legislative outcomes of the DRM include the passing of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Overall, the DRM has made possible important steps in U.S. disability politics and has afforded many protections to disabled U.S. citizens. Regrettably, the DRM has extended protections to those who have ready access to litigation and rights-based systems—primarily those who benefit from sociocultural and identity privileges, such as whiteness, lawful citizenship status, male cisheteronormativity, and socioeconomic status.

The DJM has galvanized a popular movement vested in collective liberation and an expansive understanding of access (see #AccessIsLove). Understood through a DJM framework, the notion of access and its practice extends beyond the removal of environmental barriers to encompass issues that disproportionately harm multiply marginalized disabled communities. These matters require reclamation of issues including disabled people’s bodymind autonomy, political leadership, self-representation, cultural and artistic expression, reproductive justice, freedom to participate in consensual sexual and romantic relationships, and marriage unburdened by fiscal penalties.

Over the past two decades, the DJM has awakened a full transformation of how disability politics was understood and practiced in the United States until the early 2000s. It has also grown its influence transnationally. As Sins Invalid expanded its care networks, it contributed to [language justice efforts](#) and expanded the reach of its work and resources to D/deaf and Spanish-speaking communities. In addition, it has launched [campaigns](#) and [direct action](#) in solidarity with countries enduring unimaginable loss and suffering under genocidal violence, such as Palestine.

Cripistemology and the Queercrip Code of *unseen*

unseen is informed by disability justice principles, centering crip narratives and imagery against the backdrop of a queer aesthetic, troubling categories of “ideal” humanity, and normative kinship systems. *unseen*’s queercrip code transforms categories of the “normal” into reflections of all that is out of place and foreign to cripistemology—the wisdom and knowledge produced across disability communities by and for disabled

people's survival under late-stage capitalism, primarily through the practices of solidarity, mutual aid, and access intimacy, among others.

unseen extends an artful invitation to experience life otherwise: through an understanding of disability, as Neil Marcus put it, as “an art... an ingenious way to live,” and as an expression of creative adaptation, rather than a form of inherent “lack” and “incapacity”. It is a testimonio of multiculturalism as an integral part of the human experience, rather than a plot to overtake dominant U.S. cultures. It is one of many stories of unauthorized migration as a result of slow violence, poverty, unemployment, war, and the right to live dignified and fulfilling lives, rather than a plot to steal citizens’ jobs or undermine the “American way” of life.

unseen is an ode to how disabled lives intersected by other forms of oppression draw pathways to liberation in and through community resilience. In its candor about disability and daily living, the film illuminates the multiple dimensions of the disability experience—the political, the cultural, and the affective—rendering flat stereotypes and dominant representations of disability, race, and migration obsolete.

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DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Collectively, take some time to talk about the best mode of discussion for your group—whether that be discussions in pairs or small groups, whole-group discussions, or another mode of engaging with the questions below that best suits the interests and access needs of those engaged in conversation and critical thinking around *unseen*.

1. *The power of the normative gaze, or why non-disabled strangers feel entitled to disabled people's stories.*

One of the opening scenes of the film takes place on a bus while Pedro is traveling, accompanied by his service dog. If you recall, the interaction between Pedro and two passengers (strangers to him) is plagued with indiscreet questions and intrusive comments concerning Pedro's eyes, his appearance, his service dog, his private life, and other topics that are typically out of bounds between strangers.

- Why do you think Pedro might feel inclined to remain friendly, kind, and generous while being preyed upon by the passenger's normative gaze?
- Can you think of other instances in which gendered, racialized, and otherwise negatively marked or pathologized bodyminds are read as open for public consumption?
- Think about Sins Invalid's [10 principles of disability justice](#). How can these inform solidarity and collaboration with multiple marginalized disabled people in your community? Name some examples of how they can help

undermine ableist narratives and practices by centering wisdom and knowledge produced across disability communities (cripistemology)?

2. *The liberatory art of first-hand storytelling, or why disabled people are the real experts of their lived experiences.*

Disabled people's lives are typically mediated, handled, and predetermined by a series of external forces. Whether the state, health and service professionals, parents, or guardians, something or someone often directs, assesses, or influences decisions and choices. The reasons behind this phenomenon are varied and deeply rooted in historical-political conceptions of disability as an inherently inferior expression of humanity, sometimes even labeled "subhuman." Based on these legacies and the acts of mass violence that have followed—including the eugenics movement, sanctioned incarceration, mass confinement, and institutionalization—a great majority of disabled people continue to lawfully be denied bodymind autonomy and decision-making power. These circumstances are even more harmful when disability intersects with other marginalized identities.

The film portrays the reality of compounding oppression through a first-hand narrative—Pedro's story. It is quite rare and powerful to find a story directed, filmed, starred in, and produced by undocumented immigrants, all of whom count on anonymity to protect themselves and their families from the violence of dangerous unauthorized migration policies.

First-hand narratives are transformative in that they have a unique power to rectify misconceptions about minoritized groups, re-centering their expertise as a form of *testimonio activista* (activist testimonio).

unseen uses testimonio to challenge stereotypical ways of thinking about disability and of portraying disabled people living at the intersection of other marginalized identities. The supercrip myth, which reflects the idea that disabled people must work twice as hard as non-disabled people to overcome disability and achieve normative success, is one of those stereotypes. *unseen* subverts this idea by shedding light on disabled people's personal and collective resilience in the face of systemic oppression and structural ableism instead. This creative shift lends further depth to the themes and complexity of the stories that unfold in the film. For instance, undocumented BIPOC are forced to work twice as hard to make ends meet without legal protections or the certainty of labor remuneration. They are also expected to overachieve in other areas, often to prove their worth and right to be where they are. This is also the case for undocumented people born in the United States.

- In what ways does *unseen* subvert (or challenge) the supercrip myth and the overcoming narrative?
- Do you observe these subversions in the aesthetics of the film? This could include the dialogue, the overall tone and atmosphere, or filming techniques. Offer some concrete examples and describe how they subvert the supercrip myth and the overcoming narrative.
- Brainstorm instances in which the supercrip myth and overcoming narrative are present in your community. How do these affect multiply marginalized disabled people?
- What did you learn from how *unseen* confronts these narratives, as well as instances of oppression resulting from the confluence of identities such as race, disability, and migration? How can you apply what you have learned to your own community, town, or city? Give some concrete examples.

3. *Interdependence as a form of resilience, and why it matters to cultivating joy beyond survival.*

Resilience and survival involve sacrifice and loss—this is certainly the case for migrants forced to leave everything they know and love behind in search of better futures. The film highlights the political relevance of access intimacy and interdependent relationship-making, not only as a means of survival but also as a source of joy.

- Can you identify any scenes where interdependence and access intimacy represent a source of joy for Pedro? Which are they and what major themes or topics are discussed in those scenes?
- What elements (whether cinematic, dialogical, or symbolic) represent joy in those scenes?
- Have you witnessed access intimacy and interdependent relationship-making as sources of joy in your community? Give some examples.

RESOURCES

Organizations

- [#AccessIsLove](#): #AccessIsLove aims to build a world where accessibility is understood as an act of love.

- [Disability Visibility Project](#): The Disability Visibility Project is an online community dedicated to creating, sharing, and amplifying disability media and culture.
- [Freire Institute](#): The Freire Institute is an organization for transformative community-based learning. In its programs, knowledge and life experience becomes the raw material for education.
- [Metas](#): Metas is a group of dedicated blind individuals who want to foster positive change around blindness training around the world.
- [National Coalition for Latinxs with Disabilities](#): The National Coalition for Latinxs with Disabilities (CNLD) is a volunteer organization comprised of disabled Latinx leaders and allies from across the nation who came together in 2016 to form CNLD because they shared the experience of living fractured identities (in disabled and Latinx worlds, respectively).
- [Sins Invalid](#): Sins Invalid is a disability justice–based performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color and LGBTQ/gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized.

Further reading:

- [Anti-Ableist Glossary of Disability Terms](#) by Sara M. Acevedo (también disponible en Español)
- [Neurodiversity and Migration](#) by Andy Forse
- [Why the Difference Between “Agreements” and “Rules” Matters](#) by Joshua Freedman
- [Feminist Pedagogy](#) from the J. Murrey Atkins Library (UNC Charlotte) Critical Theory Pedagogies Guide Series
- [Disabled Immigrants: Living on the Edge of Barbwire](#) by Qudsiya Naqui
- [A Critical Race and Disability Legal Studies Approach to Immigration Law and Policy](#) by Katherine Perez

CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ID: Headshot of a Mestiza woman of pale skin, dark brown eyes, and light brown neck-length hair. She is wearing a green blazer with a fuchsia pocket square.

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Acevedo is a co-founder of the National Coalition of Latinxs with Disabilities

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