fluid

[00:00.000 --> 00:05.000] Thank you for meeting with me. Okay, so we're just going to go ahead and get started.

Describe your disability

[00:15.000 --> 00:20.000] Can you briefly describe your disability and how it affects the daily life?

Taylor:
[00:20.000 --> 00:25.000] I have a T9 T10 spinal cord injury… lower body paralysis…from the belly button down And so I have my top two of the abs. But third row down…. And then I use a wheelchair.

[01:23.000 --> 01:25.000] Okay, thank you.

Relationship with math?

[01:31.000 --> 01:33.000] What is your relationship with math?
Taylor:
[01:33.000 --> 01:40.000] Um, I would say that I have like a pretty minimal relationship with math in my current state of life. Um, I enjoyed a lot of math classes during my undergraduate studies in my first few years of college. I was at the College of Bioengineeringnd. So I've taken my fair share. My major was biomechanics engineering at first.

[02:18.000 --> 02:26.000] So you took calculus. How did you, like, did you enjoy it? What made you switch majors, I guess?

Taylor:
[02:33.000 --> 02:38.000] So I guess, like, the part of math, the math that I enjoyed doing when I was a kid, I loved how open-ended it was, you know. Math that i really enjoyed was with physics classes, open ended and you dont need to know a ton of different formulas. <u>I cant stand rigidity. I like when I can be creative with it.</u>

[03:38.000 --> 03:43.000] Um, can you share any positive experiences, like, related to learning math or physics in this context?

Taylor:
[03:54.000 --> 03:59.000] My relationship with math changed. When I was in high school, I took two, I started, like, to back up from there… when i was i in my sophomore year of high school, I convinced myself that I wanted to do astrophysics. I wanted to study space and go down that path so I started to take AP physics and stats in highschool. I was trying to tell myself that this is what I wanted even though I was not enjoying it…. Then once I got to college, um, I started to take higher level physics classes. I started to enjoy those. and, like, the thoughts really started to connect. And, you know, I knew that I didn't want to pursue astrophysics, but I still appreciated it… Worked my ass off and got a pretty solid grades…. I had to take a lot of engineering classes and I began to realize that I don't have " <u>I dont have an engineering brain; I have a creative brain</u>.

So I really enjoyed conceptualizing and speaking creatively, but it felt like the bioengineering track that I was on not only would it take me about five years to finish… i started to look at other programs

and I found the speculative design program at UCSD and I was so convinced that was what I wanted to… I transfered there…

Creative vs engineering brain?

[07:05.080 --> 07:09.720] I'm interested. You made this comment of I don't have an engineering brain. I have a creative. So for you, engineering is not creative?

Taylor:
[07:14.120 --> 07:25.000] From my perspective, yeah. It's not that engineers cannot be creative… It's just very rigid and about specific numbers and measurements [as opposed to 3d modeling where you can play around with different figures and models that leverage more creativity] I am less concerned with numbers and more concerned with functionality design.

Define creativity.

[08:34.920 --> 08:39.480] So then I would like to ask a branch off question here of like, how do you define creativity?

Taylor
[08:39.480 --> 08:41.480] **Creativity is a matter of connecting dots and being able to reflect on different experiences and different instances in your life that had an impact on you and being able to compartmentalize those instances and allow those instances to fill the gaps of whatever problem you are trying to solve…. when I was in my undergraduate studies in my speculative design program, a lot of my classes were very conceptual and so I really enjoyed just living with sitting in a chair and the, you know, an example prompt would be like… come up with a concept for a biotechnology using inspiration from a maple leaf. And so it wouldn't be a matter of doing all of this research on a computer… it kind of just be like sitting in my own thoughts and like spending an hour or two hours just like with my own head and like eventually writing some thoughts down. My ex would always say "what are you doing? You're not doing any work!" she's a public health manager and I'm doing so much work here. I was like, I am too. Being creative means being comfortable with your own thoughts and being able to work through things in a very cerebral way.**

Creativity and disability?

[10:54.040 --> 11:00.840] how do you think you're like, do you do you feel that your disability has impacted the way that you interpret creativity? Like is there a relationship between your disability and your creativity?

Taylor:
[11:20.680 --> 11:22.680] I would say so, yes. Having a disability, especially a traumatic disability, your perspective changes a lot. And i also think that Perspective and creativity are congruent. As we undertake these different life experiences, our perspective changes. One term that i came up a long time ago in my design studies was 'fluid perspective' just being able to empathize with different people and put yourself in someone else's shoes so you can interpret and reflect on what is happening around you. I think this really aligns with my idea of disability… Seeing things from a different perspective.

Do you use math in your day-to-day life?

[12:50.840 --> 12:59.560] Well, thank you. Oh, wow, that's really good stuff. Um, do you feel like you ever use math in your day-to-day life?

Taylor:
[13:02.200 --> 13:04.200] **Um, I guess**
I like first thought was like, no that I thought about I guess like
math in the sense of like the dimensions of my spatial awareness, I think that there's… I guess you can sort of categorize that as I'm calling it… categorize spatial awareness into like, yeah, a lot of math
In like how I'm moving through different spaces Um, there's a lot of math involved, just like knowing Like the relative length of the wheelchair to cars or hallway…It's bizarre how confident i have become in navigating spaces. It's really cool.

How long have you been climbing for?

Taylor:
[14:52.320 --> 14:56.320] I've been climbing…. Five years. I started after my accident. 4 months post-injury my PT said we should get you out in the world and I fell in love with it.

[16:26.320 --> 16:27.320] Now we're switching gears.
[16:27.320 --> 16:30.320] Problem solving, as you know, is the meat of my study.
[16:30.320 --> 16:34.320] So how do you, how do you define problem-solving in general?

How do you define problem-solving in general?

Taylor: It's contextual… It is hard to differentiate from creativity! It's very similar.
Problem-solving is a matter of taking past experiences and instances that have an impact on your life, reflecting on them and using them as puzzle pieces to complete the bigger picture. Meaning… It involves sitting with your thoughts. But it does depend on the context. <u>There are also two different types of problem-solving: PS in the moment-- on the wall you have to solve in the moment and PS in a drawn-out way. When you are on the wall, you cannot take more than half a second to think about it.</u>

How do you think about problem-solving in math?

[19:22.320 --> 19:24.320] Like how would you define problem solving in math?
Taylor:
[19:27.320 --> 19:29.320] I think it's like pretty closely aligned. Maybe not so much experience-based but moreso… well I mean I guess it *could* be experience-based. Math is about using the fundamentals, like formulas or building blocks, seeing them as *experiences,* and completing a bigger picture with those *experiences.*

How do you approach problem-solving while climbing?

Taylor:
[20:44.320 --> 20:46.320] It depends on the style of climbing. There's a big difference in problem-solving if you are projecting and have time to take a moment to think deeply about something versus when you are problem-solving on the onsight of a comp climb that you can only look at from the ground for about ten minutes and having to make quick decisions when you are on the wall.
<u>If you are projecting,</u> well, for my style of climbing, there is not any clear beta. The terrain that I am on is for an able-bodied climber who can use their arms and legs. It's Harsh and burly movements.

Your arms and hands in very awkward positions. It's so painful because it's forcing particular movements, whereas somebody else with a different condition could do it very differently….
When I was on the black one, it is a battle between retaining that confidence that i can do this and filtering through your methods that are not feasible… What is possible and what is not. There is a difference between pulling into something that is impossible and is not feasible versus having just enough confidence and self-assurance. Just saying confidence is not enough…. *It's self-assurance*
Having just enough meat on the bone to keep me going. There's barely enough. Switching beta (we all struggle with this, all climbers). Are these attempts going to amount to something or are they futile?

[25:42.400 --> 25:49.920] And so then for, so then for on-sighting, how does problem solving look different?

Taylor:
[25:51.200 --> 25:53.840 it**'s more of trusting your gut. Because you don't have the, the luxury of time to be able to just kind of sit there and on the wall and think about all your options. It's not like,**
You can't second guess yourslef and go through different options. it's like when you have that observation period, you're just sitting like on the ground, just looking at the moves, talking to the other competitors. It's a very like, it's a very strange moment of like trying to try and see yourself in those very particular positions, but at the same time, you only have one perspective of it. And it's a lot of like, how to develop those skills, those kind of problem-solving skills that you can see something from the ground and say i know how to do that. yeah, I would say like the problem solving is just more like following your gut when you are onsighting.

[27:35.600 --> 27:39.440] So then I just want to, with your definition of problem solving and creativity, you use a lot of like cerebral or sitting with your thoughts, but would you like modify that in the climbing context because like it is more embodied or does it still feel
like a more cerebral activity to you, even on the wall?

Taylor:
[28:00.720 --> 28:04.480]
Yeah, I'd say like I think there's also a part of finding that like I'm starting to tap into is that your body knows what to do before your mind does I think that's like such a beautiful thing that I've been starting to realize, like I mean, now that like once you've been kind of that like repetitive
sort of like those like introspective moments of like this, what I'm going to do and like you have those moments, they all come down to the point where the compound and like your body starts and seeing those moments and then being able to act on those problems without you really having to think about them. Sort of like your body takes over. I've like found times where like you don't even give your mind enough time to think about it, you just follow your body.

[29:01.920 --> 29:10.720] So in that case, like when it comes to problem solving and climbing, we're almost expanding our definition even more to consider the cases in which our embodiment takes over a little bit, cause then its less cerebral? Okay, so can you describe your thought process when you're like let's say you're at a comp and you have 10 minutes to scope out. Like what are you thinking in that time? What are you looking for?

What's your planning process at a comp like?

Taylor:
[29:39.280 --> 29:46.880] I think the first thing to look for is rests-- i mean that's the nature of campusing like even the best rests for me, it's like the single arm dead, so it's not ideal. I'd say the second thing I look for is knowing like where the tempo changes. I tend to climb very quickly to the first rest if there is a rest and then hope that it's a good enough hold that I can get something back. I tend to climb is in like kind of short dynamic bursts. Climbing through a sequence, shaking out-- Climbing through a sequence, shake out, repeat

[30:46.160 --> 30:49.280] What are you doing in that shakeout process? Like are you thinking about your next sequence?

Taylor:
[30:50.160 --> 30:57.360] Thinking about my breathing. I'm thinking about limiting as much muscle contraction as possible.

[30:58.160 --> 31:14.960] You're recovering, you're shaking out. Are you like looking at the next moves and planning it ou or like when you're shaking out a little bit?

Taylor:
[31:22.560 --> 31:28.960] I'd say like I'm more focused on like regulating my heart rate and breathing than actually what's coming. Because I think like doing both is…. [?].. It is a really strange process because like, I think I do like those moments where I can be more cerebral… these are the moments when I'm trying to self-regulate rather than like planning... **The planning comes more from the ground. The body is switching over to the drivers seat when I'm climbing.**

What does it mean to break beta?

Taylor:
[33:53.920 --> 33:59.440] I would say like breaking beta will happen when your power reserves start going down and you have to really consider how much power you have left in the tank to successfully go through a sequence or even to just pull the next move, because from the ground, like because your power reserves change so drastically over the course of the climb, the way that you tackle a particular sequence in the beginning is very different than the way you will tackle the cruxes at the end. And so breaking beta is like thinking of it as efficiency rather than effectiveness… you are breaking up movement into smaller segments.

[35:17.440 --> 35:25.760] Okay, that's wow. I guess like would you say that para-climbers have to break beta more than able body climbers? Or do you think we're all kind of doing our version of that?

Taylor:
[35:36.880 --> 35:37.600] That's a good question. For comp climbing, terrain is *supposed to be* designed for multiple categories all at once and someone always gets the short end of the stick. In that way, there is a level of beta breaking. We are always having to break beta because there isn't a clear beta for any one category.

[36:30.080 --> 36:34.240] How are we defining breaking beta? Is it your definition of what happens when your power preserves break down and you have to consider how much you have left to pull the next move? Or do you have a more general broader definition?

Taylor:
[36:42.560 --> 36:45.360] Yeah, I feel like I was sort of like switching between two definitions… I think like that first definition I gave but then in general I'd say it's just like, just like the general, the general sequence of navigating through anything efficiently. I think paraclimbers tend to have more- well not less- endurance. This is tricky. I'm trying to think of a way of describing. There's more factors involved. rrather than just being exhausted, we have the factors of pain and cognitive fatigue. Just having to work through this cocktail of factors that are trying to pull you off the wall. Campusing is so inherently painful and theres a fine line between the pain of exhaustion versus the pain that I am about to get injured. Was that a tangent?

Do you think that disabled people are more creative in general?

Taylor:
[39:09.600 --> 39:14.960] 100 percent. I think like I think it's actually a nice transition from like that point of us having to work with so many compounding factors. You're having to not only assess what is happening in front of you on the wall but you are also grappling with internal battles that you are going through.

[39:52.400 --> 39:57.760] what about like in the environment in general? So just like, yeah like like just like the way that disabled individuals navigate their environment.

Taylor:
[40:19.040 --> 40:24.400] I think that disabled people are better problem solvers. You don't have to like be creative if everything is conducive to aimless navigation. You don't have to be creative if like already like set up for you. So, in a way that I have to, If I'm in a metro or like a sidewalk, the average person can just walk very aimlessly like on the phone and eating some food whatever they want becauseLike you've done it a million times….[?] I mean, when you are in a wheelchair, you have to consider EVERYTHING (different widths of the sidewalks , cracks in side walks, different routes and all these other different factors that come into play) that take you out of this mindless trajectory into more of a what is happening around you at a microscale. Ooo that's a good point [he's making a connection]--- creativity, associate creativity with all the micro associations that disabled people face as opposed every day able bodied reality of the macro. Does that make sense? I don't think it does.

[42:38.240 --> 42:42.400] Yes! So what I am hearing--- you know connecting the dots right and being able to reflect on those different experiences but what I'm hearing is that like disabled individuals have so many more dots… like the granularity of their experiences is so much more dense and so like there's so you can make so many more different connections right like neural pathways like you have so many more neural pathways going down because I'm just on the phone tripping over a something because I'm mindless and aimless, but the opposite of aimless I'm hearing you say is like there's aim--- I have to be present with my environment.

Taylor:
[40:19.040 --> 40:24.400]
all right yeah wow okay was that a really good revoice.

In which ways do you feel supported in your climbing gym and in which ways do you not?

Taylor:

[44:07.680 --> 44:10.560] **I'd say the ways that I feel supported--- like you've seen it now where they're like the the ropes area that has like a gradual transition between like the ground and the mats like I've never seen that before…they probably weren't thinking about inclusivity so much when they designed it that way but you gotta start somewhere. in ways that like I'm starting to feel *more* supported I told you about the pararoutes..... I am having more open communication with the setting team and trying to get more categories and different considerations within those categories. I don't feel supported is with the pararoutes, there are some folks who are really motivated to like learn more and learn as muchas they can and to be able to you know be able to put stuff on the wall for us. They take time our of their day to learn and engage with the material, but there are some people who do not engage and actually learn the material. It seems oh this is like kind of an extra thing I have to do And it is not aligned with the general population and doesn't apply to the majority of us, rather than seeing it is an expansion of your skill set.**

What makes it a route for disabled people?

Taylor:

[47:43.040 --> 47:49.920] it's the uh considerations of specific movements that are going to be more Conducive to those that have disabilities… the goal is to have multiple pararoutes for different categories to emulate what it's like in a competition setting…

How has climbing impacted your life?

Taylor:

[52:25.920 --> 52:42.240] To start uh climbing *is* my entire life. It's given me an outlet.
It's a space that like,o r not even a space but it's an activity that like makes me feel---I don't like using the word normal. I was gonna say like it makes me feel as normal as possible-- but I would say like a better way of saying that is like it makes me feel <u>confident in my ability to have high if not higher standards than the general population.</u> It's also an outlet for my pent up aggression and emotions. It's my happy place. Another part of it too… spending every waking second in a wheelchair and navigating the world in a wheelchair requires so much more thinking and creativity and problem solving, when i can leave my chair on the ground and <u>leave that part of me behind.</u> It feels liberating. It allows me to see what is ahead of me rather than what is beneath me. In a wheelchair, you are always trying to consider a 360 view around me, climbing… you can focus more on a clear goal rather than trying to consider literally everything all at once with your head on a swivel. Also if you think about it, it's like once you've made progress, you don't have to consider back tracking. Once you are done with sequence , you never have to think about it again. With each section on the wall, once you are past each of those points, you can make way to the next section ahead of you… putting all of your thought and ability into like a very like isolated thing and then once that's done it just like that washes away and pushes you forward

[56:40.160 --> 56:44.320] so are you saying because you're saying like this is almost an opposition to like say like everyday life like you're saying like from each section of the wall like once you're done with a sequence you don't have to look back do you feel like that's in contrast to the way that you move through the world where you're like often looking back, or why that distinction?

Taylor:
[57:00.320 --> 57:07.280] yeah I'd say it's just like in day-to-day life it's… there's so many like …there's so many other things around and it's like people and obstacles and restriction and boundaries, in climbing, like as you successfully navigate different sections, it's just on to the next rather than considering how… actually another way to say that is climbing is a more isolated experience, whereas in your day-to-day life, your impact affects so many things around you but when you're climbing you have the ability to see what is just ahead of you.

[58:39.040 --> 58:45.200] okay… um you said somewhere where it makes me feel confident in my ability to have higher standards in the general population in the context of climbing so is that an opposition to your everyday life ?

Taylor:
yeah I think like in everyday life you have these constant reminders that there is a lot against you, and of everything you lack, it causes a lot of insecurities. Those insecurities are so present, but when i'm climbing i feel so much more confident because I am so focused, though the insecurities are still present.

In what ways has climbing impacted your relationship with your disability/ or perception of it?

Taylor:
[59:59.600 --> 01:00:02.880] In day-to-day life you're having these constant reminders around you of like everything you lack but in climbing its reassuring that like once you cna be successful and move through a climb that is difficult, once you are past the adversity, you don't have to think about it any more. Concisely, in climbing, you are able to focus on all the things you do have.

What are the what are a few words that would describe the lessons that climbing has taught you

Taylor:
[01:01:26.640 --> 01:01:30.080] The first lesson is <u>How to be patient with my body.</u> Campusing is so high impact and I am so susceptible to injury and just fatigue. If you get to a point where your body is trying to do too much and I keep thinking i should keep going--- your brains like oh just keep going like one more one more one more and then really, you have to be patient with your body yeah if you're not then you will get injured. The second is <u>Being a part of a community that appreciates you for who you</u> are and all the positive elements that you bring to the table and i encourage everyone to find that. Seasonal friends and everyone feels like a family. <u>Pain is such a big factor in my climbing. H</u>aving a healthier relationship with pain. <u>Seeing it as almost a companion</u> rather than something to be afraid of. Pain is always there and will always impact my climbing. Know how to be friends with it.

[01:05:02.160 --> 01:05:03.520] I lied but I have one more question but it's less like existential…

Do you believe that climbing has influenced your problem-solving abilities outside of the climbing context

Taylor:
[01:05:43.360 --> 01:05:49.120] You ask just good questions Gabby, God. I think like a simple like a simple response is just like learning how to live in the moment. It's a concentrated and isolated experience of being on the wall. There's a lot there to learn in that moment.

Extra:
Over the course of the last 6 years and some change, my brain has changed immensely. Specifically, the way I approach everyday tasks and interact with new environments. When your life has been broken up into distinct chapters, divided by life-changing traumas, it feels like the stopwatch that unravels and coevolves alongside your personal timeline stops and restarts at the beginning of those chapters.

Once that stopwatch begins again, it feels like you're given a chance to relearn yourself, your body, and how you interact with the world around you. Your preconceptions of how you're supposed to or used to operate gradually falls away and you have to begin remolding.

My disability has made me more curious because it's given me this opportunity to redevelop my personal perception of how I fit into all of these in unaccommodating and unintuitive environments.

Curiosity, for me, stems from a lack of intuition. When you become so familiar with a chapter that has drawn on for too long, you fall into this pit of feeling like everything is too intuitive and straightforward. And so you lose the need or motivation to exercise your curiosity.

So, as you become more in touch with your body and the world around you, you have to make a conscious choice to stoke that creativity and resist the urge to fall into a pit of saturated intuition.

My curiosity has made me a better problem solver because I make an intentional effort to not assume anything. Especially when it comes to my body and how it moves.

Problem-solving is like a muscle. If you let yourself fall into a pit of intuition and assumption, it atrophies. But if you allow yourself to put it under consistent and intentional stimuli (I.e. rock climbing) then it continues to grow and with that growth you can become more adept with navigating all the other facets within your life.