

Hello, I am Sage Cheng, my gender pronoun is she/her. I am an alien in New York. I do digital experience research and engagement for an advocacy group, it's called Access Now, an international human rights organization. At Access Now, this means I manage and to make digital security tips to help front line communities.

I have a MFA in communications, my background is in advertising and publishing, but my heart goes with visual communications.

My day-to-day work can be described as design advocacy. I advocate for the protection of human beings using technology. Recently, I have been working on identity management for human rights defenders. This is quite a challenge. Young girls in Egypt get arrested for sharing their outfits and lifestyles on TikTok. Dissidents suffer doxing and discrediting campaigns for participating in demonstrations. People in multiple countries are facing physical security threats due to a personal information leaks.

Especially now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become harder and harder for us to enjoy the free and open Internet, as we know it. Digital identity management has almost become a surviving skill for nations. In a way, it's like playing a game: You get the rewards for fixing the broken parts and hitting points, but any reckless move can have real consequences.

I got lucky because I'm part of a community. This community is formed by people who believe in and work to advance a human rights centered design mindset.

The community includes user researchers, designers, tool developers, digital security trainers with a diverse background.

My advice for anyone who is eager to enrich yourself with knowledge in usability and design: recognize, appreciate and make full use of the community you're in. AXIS has provided us a perfect platform.

Let's take this opportunity.

Make connections, share personal stories, compare differences, and learn from each other.

My name is Helen. Pronouns she/her. I live and work in Sub Saharan Africa.

Mainly, I deal with training people on a new concepts, and right now my line of work is digital security in particular. How to deal with online harassment and the community that I deal with at the moment is young women, tech-savvy women, women who are trying to use... To include digital security into their career and making it a source of livelihood.

Trainings can take on different forms, it depends on how much time we have, but I try always to cover a few key areas. For example, I will teach Mailvelope when I'm discussing email encryption, how to communicate safely, especially for organization, Mailvelope, it's easy to use, it's just... It's convenient to download, so it would more or less appear on every session I had. For phone communications, I will contribute with Signal and just try to explain to people how different it is from WhatsApp but give another option like Wire and Telegram. TOR browser will definitely come up. I really like TOR Browser. I've had the pleasure of working in their UX lab and learning, it's a dedicated bunch of people, and it's very nice to share information that I learned to my community. So that always comes up.

The other tools off head would be maybe for VPN because we have shut down issues and Internet Restrictions, so for VPN, I would go for Psiphon also TOR Browser for Android, Orbot, Orfox, and then maybe Privacy Badger as a way of just improving their navigation.

How I got into design and UX is quite by accident, happily. I met team a that were visiting Kampala. It comprised of Megan and Jon. Well, I was giving, I was co-facilitating a session that they were at, and I was talking about a tool I was working on at the time, a project by Amnesty International, and we got to talking and immediately clicked how important usability was. It seemed for me like, Eureka, this is something that I was looking for, something that resonated with all the challenges that I had had thus far as a trainer, and I took... Started to communicate with the team. And they invited me to participate in trainings and of course, this huge, huge opportunity to help give a little bit of insight in the development of a persona template.

Day-to-day, my work looks mostly interacting with past participants, people who have trained before, who are in the community, checking on them, seeing what they need, helping them connect with each other, very important. And the other part of the time I am looking for resources or coming up with ideas of how to create interactive workshops. So learning, learning and learning with fun, learning methodologies that stick, learning with experience, engaging participants. It's just a whole mess because it's very difficult to have this education here, I did not go to school or a degree in it, so it has to be self-taught, so there's a lot of resources that I have to sit down and revise to prepare for one session, I have to prepare months in advance.

An interesting project that I have worked on in the past is something we also partnered with, with Internews, they had this amazing idea to write a booklet, an end user guide explaining what digital security was to just the ordinary run-in the mill person on the street and... But we were targeting female readers just to address this issue of online violence in Sub Saharan Africa, so it was such a

long process, but a very exciting one because we were learning every day what to write what not to write. How to compose paragraphs, how to use analogies, my god, it was a learning experience for me and also for the reader.

A thing that I find challenging is collecting feedback, it's as challenging as it is interesting, because you might go in maybe slightly biased with your questionnaire that you've worked very hard on, the questions have been reviewed and approved and you riled up to get a certain set of results, and then you test with people, you test with groups, and they give you a huge blow to your ego, to everything that you had preconceived, everything that you thought would happen, or the kind of data that you anticipated to receive. And it's always challenging because then you have to go... You even sometimes realize that the question that you are asking is not relevant anymore, you should be asking different questions. I find it challenging, but a happy challenge.

When I need help or assistance normally I will search online and try to troubleshoot the issue. But I'm quite quite amazed by the quality of the individuals that I have within the community that I am in. And everybody has bright ideas, everybody is really, really intelligent and smart and amazing, and we help each other out. Just text a friend an issue and... Boom, they have your back. I have a few people from Internews, I have one very close friend from Zimbabwe, and then so many more. So I don't lack a place to go when I need help.

For a person who is starting to learn about UX and user research, I would first say, congrats on choosing this path. It's a kind of process that will only bring you dividends, you indeed start to see things differently, and you can use what you have learned in your daily life. Something that is always constantly on my mind, that makes me chuckle up a bit is when I go to a place we have one of these doors which you don't quite know whether to push into or pull out, and that's a UX issue. The people who design that should have done more user research, in my opinion, unless you have already studied psychology as part of your education, you must be ready and willing to explore aspects of the human mind and behavior relearning things that most times we take for granted and as you're preparing the objectives of any research that you want to conduct, with a certain sample or group of people... Yes, it should be in that solving a problem, fixing an issue, creating a new feature on a tool, but also leave a little bit of wiggle room, be open to finding insights, be open to learning something that you didn't already know about your own tool.

Hello, everyone. Memo Esparza. He and him. I live in Mexico, in Mexico's second biggest city. It's called Guadalajara. My focus right now is on open source and open design. I got into design in UX because first I studied product design, like industrial design, physical products. Then after a few years in that area, I got a little bit turned down by the design at the time in the world especially, the time of physical products because I thought that it was a industry that was just for filling the needs of the market in order to create products that people needed or they think that they needed. So I grew a little bit uncomfortable with that idea, and I basically quit design for a few years and I turned back to tech entrepreneurship, so I started working on a couple of projects with a few friends from my University. We had the opportunity to present our work at a huge tech conference in Hong Kong. So that's where my career path turned to tech. And then when I was involved in a tech-environment, I met a friend and mentor that is a designer, and he helped me regain my inner trust or my inner creative trust in the power that I have to change the world.

So I was... I considered again, myself a designer and I started a whole new career specifically in the design for technology and UX, UI and all of that jazz.

So yeah, day-to-day my work looks like a lot of calls. I have calls with a lot of people, I think that design is all about connections.

So I am a designer and the first thing that I value the most about design work is about the connections that you make. So, my day-to-day work looks like that, a lot of calls and then some focused work in the afternoon and sometimes at night, I'm a night owl.

The most interesting project I've worked on, I think is Open Collective. It's a startup that I contribute to. I think that is the most interesting project that I've met because I think it addressed one of the biggest issues that we have now, that is money management and providing new ways and new possibilities to manage money from a community perspective, so I think that's great.

And also, I think that the goal of those, the ultimate goal of Open Collective, and what I like the most is that it's not about become profitable even though that it's also part of the goals, but the ultimate goal is to change people's mindsets so that people can think of communities in a different way and think about money in a different way. So that seems like a very ambitious goal, so that's why I like it, I like to go after very ambitious goals, and I love that feel. When I need help, I go talk to my mentors and also I seek a space of solitude and calm to meditate and really think through what the problem I'm stuck in. I usually find the best solution thanks to the connection that I can make with others.

And the last but not least: What kind of advice would I give to someone as they learn about UX and user research?

I think I will resume all of my possible advice with just one thing: question everything, question yourselves, question the information that you read, and question the people who are above you in the decision chain, question everything and follow your best instinct. So yeah, that's it, and thank

My name is Allon, and I go by he/him. I work for a privacy-focused company called Least Authority as a user researcher. I work both on the commercial and open source Cloud source product called Private Storage, as well as a number of other open source tools.

Part of my work involves making our tools available and usable for civil society organizations with a special focus on the digital rights community.

I got into UX when I start doing web design as a teenager. I really enjoy the challenge of coming up with technical solutions for small things, as well as to have the creative space of the canvas to present something to website as drawn.

After work on international policy and human rights for a number of years, I decided to come back to the more tangible work of user experience, with a particular focus on user research.

Day-to-day, my work consists of planning out research projects, a little bit of product management and preparing follow-up steps from research findings. I have a lot of meetings in which I try to advocate for the user based on research findings, as well as for the need for user research to ensure our work is relevant and usable. Sometimes of this, really only a small minority of my time, I conduct the actual research, for example, by interviewing people. Then a chunk of my work also involves synthesizing the data collected into research findings and recommendations and providing input on various design questions that we face. A project I found very interesting is one I worked on recently. It involved understanding how people working for human rights organizations use file storage and sharing. In this project, we both wanted to understand more about people's behavior as well as draw lessons for what that means for the secure cloud storage product that we work on.

I think making that translation from real world behavior that we are learning about into concrete product recommendations is always a fun challenge.

Projects that I find particularly challenging to work on are ones that require a rather different mindset or experience from what people are used to or are familiar with. Generally speaking, when working on UX, you want to meet people where they are at, with their thinking and with the technologies that they are familiar with. When you have to introduce a very new concept to them, that is pretty challenging.

When I get stuck and need help, I reach out to people whose expertise I value. The smart and kind folks at Simply Secure are first on my list.

As an advice to someone new to user research, I would first say "be open and feel comfortable to ask others for advice." I've come to know the UX community as incredibly generous with sharing knowledge and expertise, and with giving advice to anyone who ask for it. So make use of that.

I would also say there are a ton of online resources that are worth reading such as blog posts and knowledge bases, the ones from Simply Secure as well from the Norman User Group come to mind.

In addition, there are also many other valuable things to read, such as books, that can help you to get started.

I, for example, benefited a lot from reading "Just Enough Research" from Erika Hall, and "It's Our Research" from Tomer Sharon. One point there to remember is that you'll want to make sure that you don't do research on your own, make sure others who make decisions based on the outcome of your research, are involved with planning as well as with conducting the research other than that, practice, practice, practice. And ask for feedback.

Okay. Hi, my name is Eriol Fox. My pronouns are they/them or she/her. I'm pronoun agnostic really, so you can use any pronouns with me.

Sharing about my context, region and the tools I work on in the industry focus. So the reason where I'm located isn't necessarily where I do my work, but it can be. So I'm based in the southwest of the UK, in a city called Bristol. I worked, until very recently, at an organization which was based out of Kenya that did primarily a lot of worker across East Africa, Central Africa, South Africa, and some of the other global south countries or developing countries, as you could describe them. So South America and across India and the Middle East. So that organization I used to work for, worked mostly globally. My context is I'm a UX design or a product designer, I guess, that's the title that I use, but I don't really... I wouldn't say that I do everything that I do falls within that category. I do a lot of community-based stuff as well, so that's kind of tricky to categorize exactly what I do job-wise. I mean it is a lot of design work, it is user research and it is lot of technology building and tools building and tool improvement that I tend to move around definitions, the definition of design tasks, really.

The tools that I work on or have worked on was a tool in a Kenyan organization, it was a data collection tool that was either hosted or you could deploy the source code yourself and host it yourself. So at one point there was a software as a service model for it. This data collection tool was used and kind of was talked about as a mapping tool as well because it had a quite popular mapping feature within it. Although really it was about data collection, not necessarily just about the kind of map, mapping of data. And that was a data collection tool, the collected data from a lot of different kinds of sources, through SMS and Twitter, through the web hosted application, through surveys that people could configure quite heavily, or even in just data that UCSB/C or JSON files. So basically it was like a big repository for data that configured location reasonably well. The specific cases that it has been used is a lot of election monitoring across countries that are pushing for democratic processes or countries that have democratic processes that actually kind of don't in practice. So anti-corruption stuff, a lot of human rights advocacy and kind of collecting information from citizens, the citizens speaking truth to power of stuff in it. A lot of that kind of work was often by NGOS are often by individuals as well and it would maybe be used to inform policy or kind of put forward a change in local government or central government. So yeah, that was a lot of it too. It was also used in healthcare data collection, it was used in an environmental kind of project where maps may be pollution or collect data on pollution, from oceans or even air pollution.

Really, there was kind of anything that you think that you might wanna collect data on there was likely an instance of data collection on that topic. There were even some quite unique and interesting data collection instances. That was the tool that I used to work on a lot. I've since moved into an e-commerce, open source tool that's around food systems and trying to kind of build sustainable, community-led and I guess democratic, socially-focused food systems, and to your enable producers, growers and farmers globally to have a place of which to sell their produce through community-organized hubs. So there is both functionality for the producers to sell directly through the e-commerce platform and also for individuals to organize food hubs where producers can deliver their goods and then they can be sold on. And to create kind of a network as well. So I'm

now more working in the context of food and food systems and technology tools that enable good food system, really.

I still do a fair bit of work in the human rights space, I, at least, that's my intention to not stop doing work on other kinds of tools that are Human Rights focused, they're doing some other projects make around population management and education, and contraception education and stuff like that in different countries and managing the population from an environmental perspective. We're doing a few different projects and possibly one even about, a little bit about, weapons tracking and monitoring, as far as like a database and in kind of the space of information, open information intelligence around arms.

So those are the kinds of contexts and kind of spaces that I work in and do design work in specifically. That covers that... It wasn't brief.

How did I get into designing UX? Oh, I don't know whether that's gonna be brief either. I studied art and design, but I had a real love for computers and technology in the early 2000s is when I did my degree. And so I actually did a degree in something called Time-based Media, which is an interesting area subject, but a lot of what that was promoting was the use of technology in creative expression in art, so actually we did lots of film, we did lots of audio, we did loads of installations. We early web technologies, a lot of the students use early web technologies to investigate different kinds of art really and make art, that kind of thing.

So from that art background, I moved into design because, really, art just wasn't a feasible career and I liked to solve problems and really my pathway into designing UX, was really through a community project, I did a lot of volunteering for a community development project. I was pretty much a, almost, semi-full-time member of volunteer staff, doing lot of work in the community running homework clubs for asylum-seeker families, kids, migrant kids and under-represented and under-supported demographic socio-economic background. I did things like community gardening and environmental projects, the big funded projects, and I managed a lot of that stuff, and I was on a community... The community board, I think I was the vice chair of that community region at one point.

And I did that for a good long time, just under... Around about seven years. So I've always been in the kind of community for good space and those were some of the first times I got to actually work on design projects, to then build my career in portfolio. In fact, the first design project I ever did was a mapping project, a local mapping project, which was based off of a project called Green Maps, which was a New York-based project great. And I created a green map of our little area in cooperation with the residents that is now a permanent fixture in the local area as a signpost.

So today, what does... So that's how I go into UX and design and got a job in it. And then finally ended up in the for good and human rights-ish design space mostly. Day-to-day what does my work looks like? That's really tricky because it really depends. I think that I like to approach my design work from a very conversational point of view, so I collaborate a lot, I don't do a lot of kind of solo head down study, research, insulated work. I do my best stuff in collaboration, so I have a lot of conversations with people, sketches as those conversations are happening, whether or not they look like user interviews or whether they're just kind of, I guess, they're a form of user interview, which



is deeply kind of embedded and ethnographic in its kind of process, but without me really being intentional about that necessarily, it's just kind of how I gravitate towards things. So that's lots of conversations, a lot of reading, a lot of building resources as well, I tend to join organizations or work in organizations that are new to design practices, they require a lot of onboarding and adoption, and we're figuring out what their design process look like, looking for different frameworks and tools that work really well, that's often what I do is try and be aware of and information gather, and then really defining needs and defining projects or improvements or features. Eventually, it's like working with product development, product management and technology teams to really work out what is the next piece of feature work to work on a technology project. And then kind of going through sprint cycles of kind of work, cycles of work, they're not just sprints to improve products essentially, which kind of the typical process that was pretty well established towards the end of my last job and what I'm hoping to bring into this new role is like a feature or an improvement that is based off of solid data feedback, user need, has a first instance, first creation, is collaborated on within a frame, or within a period of time that is tested thoroughly in early iteration, that then kind of goes through the team and other users and then gets improved upon and then gets put into a release and then continually improved upon through testing and through monitoring and making sure that everything works. In reality, that doesn't, well you don't always have the time to do or keep up with the things that you've deployed and make sure that they're working properly. It's kind of tricky it... Yeah, without tangent-ing, but that's kind of what my day-to-day tends to, but it really does depend what going on at any given time, I've actually been giving a lot more workshops and doing a lot more building how we work with users in a participatory way, especially in my last role. I was doing a lot of that with one particular project and kind of then digesting the artifacts and design things from those workshops and trying to figure out what process to use, so actually a lot of discovery work when able.

What is a most interesting project you've worked on? Tricky question. I think... I'm trying to decide. I think I've got recency bias for a lot of this, but I honestly... I do think that one of the most interesting projects where I learned a lot and was presented with a lot of new challenges and a lot of new ways of doing things, and a lot of exploratory work and a lot of good collaboration was a project at my last role which was called Isooko [I-S-O-O-K-O]. It's a Rwandan word. So it was about technology and peace building, it was really... It was funded by the EU so it was kind of restrictive in a lot of ways because it was kind of certain deliverables where needed and dictated by grants. But, honestly, being able to work within the context of how do we do peace building activities to leverage technology and have people users, real humans trying to do peace building activities there on the ground in violent and traumatized and troubled communities. How do they actually want to use tech? Do they want to use tech? So I actually think that was a really interesting project, I would love to be doing more around technology and peace building in the future. I think that is a main one. The other interesting projects is, I'm endlessly fascinated about the psychology and the environment, the cycle of crisis, because I did a lot of work on crisis response in my last role, I find it very interesting to try and find how, again, people use technology in crises and why and how it doesn't work in some cases, and does work in other cases, and how it gets adapted and how cycles repeat themselves during different crises if the same technology gets built and then gets thrown about when the crisis isn't around and all that kind of stuff. I think that is a really, really interesting, it's more like how we actually respond to an event by using technology and repeating technology. Yeah, I think that's interesting.

What's the most challenging project I worked on? Probably actually the same project, the peace building one, the peace building technology one and crisis one for sure. Purely, purely because... Not really from a design point of view or like... It was more from a frustrating structure, NGO, non-profit grant funding deliverables, each member of consortium having different things that they need to... Boxes that they needed to tick to be able to receive their grant money within the consortium and things like that. So I think that the most challenging projects are often the ones where they are... I kind of wanna use the term strangled, but that doesn't feel like a nice term to use, but restrained by some of the kind of logistics that don't leave room for flexibility and exploration and discovery really. And also the subject matter was challenging for me because it was... it was intensely personal and intensely something I felt like a lot of responsibility as a designer, especially working that closely with the users, I felt a big responsibility to the people that I was working for and with, and that.

When you need help, where do I go for assistance? My online communities, absolutely 100%. Or my in-person communities pre and, hopefully, post-COVID. I actually really love online communities anyway, because you get a wide-sourced tool, in a way. I found that when I started going to online communities is people everywhere in the world with a problem or with a statement or with an idea or with anything really, that the kind of responses that you would get do give you more different kinds of data points and more information and more, richer information in a sense than maybe your local communities, not the local communities also aren't. Also when I need help with something very, very specific, sometimes I will look to books and resources and PDFS and repositories of information, maybe even, if I don't know where to find those things, like I've already found that resource and I will maybe search for it online, essentially, ask people within the community for a specific kind of resource, but I do really value being able to refer to published materials where they're published by a kind of book publisher or whether it's self-published or anything like that, I do kind of look to that. It depends on the kind of assistance really... But yeah, those are really the two things.

What advice would I give to someone else as they are learning about UX and user research? I mean I do a fair amount of mentoring and I get asked questions a lot, which is always really, really nice to be kind of looked at as a useful source of guidance and information. From my tone you can probably tell that it still baffles me sometimes sometimes that I am, but you know. I would say, if they're learning about UX and use the research, I'd say things like curiosity is one of the useful things that a designer can try and cultivate, like a genuine curiosity about how people work, how things work, how people work in relation to things. Things like, I think about listening skills, how you have conversations and how you listen, and how you engage with the world around you, and how you form that into thoughts and hypotheses and noticing problems and being aware and being responsive to a situations and environments and things like that, and placing yourself into relevant and appropriate-timed communities and events and things to discover things that you're interested in.

I think that, I guess I really do super value that approach to UX and user research. I would also advocate for finding a community that is supportive that you enjoy being around. I think that sometimes design, and not sometimes, it's actually still quite a profession that you, unless you're working in big corporate... Or you know, big budget places, we tend to not be working with, directly with, a lot of other designers, so finding a community that can be supportive is actually

super important and actually critical when you're working solo or working on something. So yeah, that, read, learn, have conversations, ask people questions. And also don't, I know that this is super specific to my location, as in Europe, maybe Europe or maybe even the UK, but here there is not such a focus on certifications or formal education, so much, on being, doing UX and user research. So I think I meet a lot of folks that are nervous that they don't have qualifications, or they don't think that they can do it, or they don't believe that they can transition into a UX and user research career.

So I do try and encourage them to not be too hung up on feeling like they need to be complete experts in things before trying things out. And that's really the advice I give. There's slightly different advice that I give or insight that I give when people are particularly interested in humanitarian kind of work, doesn't differ really too much, but it kind of just... I add a little bit of extra stuff around like trying to learn how funding works and how NGOs kind of operate slightly differently than for-profits, things like that, just being interested and keen on that, as well as the design sort of thing.

Oh right, I think that is all the questions that were there. I hope this recording has worked... Let's see.

Thanks!