EPISODE 53

[INTRODUCTION]

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[00:00:41] TG: You're listening to the UI Narrative podcast, the biweekly podcast that shares the stories of people of color interface designers and researchers, and their contributions towards creating user-centered experiences. And I'm your host, Tolu Garcia. Let's get started.

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[EPISODE]

[00:01:57] TG: Hello, everybody. Welcome back to the UI Narrative podcast. Let me introduce you to today's guest. As a UX researcher, Morgan utilizes her background in mixed method research, ethnography, and public policy to tackle complex systemic problems. She specializes in developing the research strategy to elevate underrepresented users, narratives, in order to build excellent products. For five plus years, Morgan has scoped, conducted, synthesized, and socialized her qualitative and quantitative research studies to help stakeholders understand how products development can create systemic impact.

Morgan has led multiple research projects across various disciplines within companies, corporate, engineering, people development, diversity, benefits and effective organizations in the US, Europe and Latin America.

Morgan Ramsey, welcome to the UI Narrative podcast.

[00:02:54] MR: Oh, yes, I'm excited to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

[00:02:58] TG: Alright. So, listeners, from the title of this episode, you can guess that transition from HR analyst to AI/UX researcher, you can tell that UX design wasn't Morgan's initial career path. So, Morgan, I'd like for you to start us off by talking about your first career in human resources. What led you to choose HR initially as a career?

[00:03:21] MR: Yes, it's actually a great question. A question I get a lot because everybody's like, 'You're an HR, but now you're in UX." So the reality is that I didn't intentionally choose HR. So what happened was I was studying, I went to Duke, and I was doing internships at Google within their people operations department, because that was the only internship they had for nontechnical, basically non-engineers. And so I really want to work at Google. I was really fascinated in their programming. So I signed up for my freshman year for an immersion program, which was a one week case study competition in my first year.

However, my sophomore year, I became way more interested in research. And I went to the Dominican Republic my sophomore year to do a study around a policy that came out that retroactively took citizenship away from Haitian Dominicans. So in that process, I was learning more about possible ways that technology can kind of alleviate the situation or could even be …

Maybe even a leverage to how we can create more representation and less discrimination in the country. I was fairly ambitious as a sophomore. But that was my plan.

And so as I was thinking about how technology could kind of circumvent some of this discrimination, either through having more opportunities for education for this marginalized population, or even surfacing work opportunities, because without documentation, they couldn't work. I started thinking about Google had a product called Google Loon at the time. And that was essentially trying to give Internet connection to very remote regions. And I was doing my study in a very remote region.

So I kind of put two and two together and I was like, "Well, if I continue down this path that I'm going for with Google, perhaps I can get closer to the Google Loon team and start figuring out solutions for such a marginalized population. I can think about how remote Internet could come to this community or a community such as that and start really getting to the core and helping some human rights issues that I truly believed in." So I thought technology was going to be the solution to a lot of policy, and even human rights problems.

So with that said, I continued on. I decided I'll keep going for Google. I did two internships with HR. And then finally, the offer after I entered my junior year was to come full time at Google in HR. And so it was all kind of part of my master plan of learning more about HR, because it was an interesting field to me, but it wasn't the end goal per se.

[00:05:51] TG: Ah, see. Such strategy there of like planning out your whole career. It's amazing.

[00:05:55] MR: Yup. Thanks.

[00:05:58] TG: So I want to get into like what's your first memory of you having interest in UX research, because you're talking about how you wanted to bring in remote Internet, do Google's product to Haiti. So I wanted to see if that's maybe where the seed was planted? Or if there was another instance you had where you first were interested in UX research.

[00:06:16] MR: Yeah, so I didn't know what UX research was before I got to Google. So what I came back from – I was in the DR. When it came back from Dominican Republic, I went to my

econ professor, or I went to my public policy professor. And I was like, "I don't know what this is. But basically, I went down to the Dominican Republic, I had this questionnaire, I spoke to everybody in Spanish, and English, and a little bit of Creole. And I took all their information. And I did all these pattern finding, and I found themes. And I told the NGO that I was working with like what they should do to possibly alleviate this problem. I don't know what that world is called. But I want to do that." And they were like, "Yeah, that sounds like econ."

And I took one quick little econ class, and it did not go to that. So I was like, "This can't be econ. It can't be econ." So then I was like, "It's fine. I'll just figure it out at Google what this world is called, because I know it's not econ. Maybe it was econ, but you know it wasn't that great of an econ." So I was like, "Maybe it's something else."

And so then I went to Google. And I started talking to people like, "Hey, I did this project my junior year, my sophomore year, and I was super, super interested in. It's this blah-blah-blah." And I did the whole spiel." Do you know what that is?" And nobody really knew. And I kept asking people on my team. The first team I got on at Google was an analytics team. So it was a lot of scientist. A lot of people who were industrial and organizational – What was it? IO psychology? So a lot of PhD experts. And they were telling me, "Oh, yeah, it's IO psych. It's IO psych." Until I kept talking to people and eventually spoke to this woman named Kat Hicks. And she was phenomenal. She was somebody who was on my team, but adjacent kind of to like my little cubicle. And I shared with her what I was hoping to do something. Similar to what I did in the DR. I just didn't know what it was called. And she was like, "Oh, that's called UX research." And I'm like, "What is UX research?" And that was maybe five months into my time at Google post-graduation where I found out about the term. And so then I was like, "Oh, that's the name of what I've been looking for and searching for, and I'm definitely interested in UX research." So kind of trying to figure out the breadcrumbs of what I did in the DR I guess would be the first memory, but technically and officially was after Kat told me the title of what I was doing.

[00:08:29] TG: Well, Kat Hicks, she saved the day, dear. I mean, post five months working at Google. Like were you looking that entire time since you had started at Google?

[00:08:39] MR: Yeah. So like you mentioned, too, in terms of the strategy, I was extremely strategic with how I thought about my career. I knew I was going into Google and I knew I was

going into a position I didn't know too much about or wasn't like super, super, super excited to be in because I had this end goal in mind, right? Like I wanted to get back to going to Dominican Republic, bringing some technology down and helping the people that I was interviewing I wanted to help the community. So I thought going to HR was going to be a stepping stone so I can get to that space. And so there's a lot of strategy involved in terms of just thinking about who I need to connect to and how I need to just talk to people. Just keep talking. Keep learning keep striving. And so it was definitely a long strategic process. But it ended up being super helpful, because after five, six months, I was able to figure out the answer to my question.

[00:09:32] **TG:** Wow! So when you made that decision that you wanted to leave human resources at the industry, how did you go about figuring out your next steps for getting started in UX? And I know you set your goals for yourself of how you wanted to climb a ladder within Google. So if you could tell us a little bit about that.

[00:09:47] **MR:** Yeah. So it's interesting. I was more so interested in going – Or I guess a ladder over. So at Google, we have these things called ladders. And when you're in HR, you're in a specific department or kind of a trajectory is what they call it, where you can go from level two, three, four, five and keep climbing up the ranks that way. I wanted to do something very different because I realized UX research was not in that – It's not in HR. So it's not in that department. And I had to actually go over a department, which meant that I would go to a whole other ladder, which is like it was called the research ladder.

But to jump from HR to the research ladder was nearly impossible at Google, especially for somebody at my level, because I just came out of school. I didn't have a PhD. I didn't have a masters. I only really had my experience in the Dominican Republic. And also I was in a lot of research programs at Duke. So I had my collegiate history, but nothing more than that. And it's extremely rare, as I mentioned, for somebody to hop over a ladder. And also, when you hop over a ladder, usually you're down leveled. And I was already at the lowest level coming in because I was in entry level. So it was, again, impossible for me to make that jump.

So what I did was that I thought, "Well, how did I get to this point? And how did I get to know what the title was called?" I spoke to people. So I started thinking about, "Okay, the angle is to get to this level on this ladder. I have to make what is called a diagonal ladder transfer. I have to

go up a level and over a ladder. If that's the end goal, what type of work do I want to do when I'm in that space?" And I realized, "Of course, I want to do something like I was in the DR." So I looked on our internal site to see teams that were doing research in that area in those countries or whatever that spoke to my mission, which is to amplify unheard voices. And I stumbled upon a team at google called the Next Billion Users. And they were a team that were invested in going to India and, I believe, was Argentina, and Mexico. I was also very interested in primary Latin American countries or Spanish-speaking countries. And so I was looking to identify with projects or groups that were aligned with that mission as well.

So I found that team, and then I started going to a lot of their talks internally. There was like a conference they had in the winter and something they had in the spring. And there was a woman there named Nithia, and she was giving a talk on her work. And so, again, with my kind of mentality I was like, "Okay, I'm going to put my researcher hat. On I'm going to research the team that's closest to what I want to do, and then I'm going to identify somebody there that I can learn from." So I reached out to her. I was just fascinated with her presentation of course. And I was like, "I would love to learn from you." Because, again, I don't have masters. I'm not in school. I don't have any way of getting any type of knowledge except to talk to people and to teach myself.

And she took me on. And that was in 2017 or so. She took me on to be her mentee for the next several years. So that was one kind of pillar. I had to make sure that I was learning with somebody. The second step I did was I also had to make sure I had the project work to build up my portfolio as a researcher. So that same year I decided to move to Ireland. And that was kind of a – It was an option or an opportunity in the rotational program I was in in HR. But I strategically moved to Ireland, because how many people do you know have the opportunity to move to Dublin? Like there were other options where we could move to like London, or you could be in other really cool places. But I thought that narrative of living in Ireland and getting to know Ireland was also Dublin as Google's European headquarters. So hearing from people who were at Google from all over the world at their headquarters, I really wanted to know what that narrative was about and starting to see google from a different lens, a different perspective, and start understanding the story. Because, again, I'm in HR at this point. So I want to hear how Googlers were experiencing Google from a different perspective.

So while I was out there I thought, "Okay, I'm in this position. I wasn't doing too much within research. And so for my next role, I really wanted to make sure in my rotation that I had the opportunities to build up that portfolio." So with Nithia and also kind of just thinking about my strengths, I crafted my own role within the program within HR, which is I could be a UX researcher for this woman who worked in Paris. Because, one, she was a black UX'r. She was a black UX designer. And she also was somewhat connected to the previous roles I had in HR. Again, I was kind of leveraging my network to create a proposal. Pitch myself as this researcher. Say that this is a learning opportunity. They would get a free resource because they don't have any researchers on that team. And in response, I would get the experience I need to build up my resume as a researcher. So that was also part of it. I had this whole pitch and this scoped out plan for how I would do research for this team, for this woman who worked in Paris while I was in Ireland. And it worked out really, really well.

So with Nithia as my kind of like personal mentoring, getting myself to as I need to be mentally as a research and kind of giving me resources as well, I had that under lock. And then I also had the work in terms of my professional work and making sure that I had my resume built up in a way with different projects and reaching out to other teams, and really claiming myself as a researcher before I was minted as a researcher at Google really helped my credibility as well.

[00:15:14] TG: Wow! that is incredible, Morgan. I mean, basically you built out this whole project plan for yourself of like how you're going to build your report at Google over these years to eventually get your dream job as a UX researcher. And, I mean, doing that through amplifying unheard voices, I think, is amazing. And also, too, like researching the team that you wanted to learn from. Then you went ahead and found yourself a mentor and were able to shadow her.

And I always talk about mentorship on this podcast about how important it is to find yourself a mentor or a coach to just show you the ropes. You'll learn a lot faster that way. And also through that, you're able to build your portfolio by working with the different companies across the world and create your own role for UX researchers. So I think that's really fascinating, like how you were able to like construct your own path to become a UX researcher at Google.

[00:16:11] MR: Thank you. Thank you. It was definitely not an easy journey, I will say.

[00:16:15] TG: I can imagine.

[00:16:17] MR: I think I probably said it pretty like, "And then this happened. And this happened." But there were a lot of times, I guess, when we get towards the end of the story where I had this whole plan. And then of course, as life would have it, I thought after all this I would be seen as a researcher and I'd be like an easy transition. But stuff happened where it was very difficult and I had to think about that I might actually have to leave Google and not have a job. So there are a lot of risks. And we can go into that. I don't know if you –

[00:16:42] MR: Yeah. Yeah, let's go into it. Where did you go to find information to grow to get – Because I know you had the mentor, which is part of your training. But as far as like terminology, learning what type of research methods, to use all of that, how did you go about your training?

[00:16:57] MR: Yeah. So in terms of training, I definitely read this book, which is called the – I think it's the Hundred Universal Methods of Design. It's this little purple book. And my mentor recommended this to me, because the biggest thing in UX research, I find, especially in interviews, is knowing your methods. Which method works well? Which one doesn't? When you would use one over the other? And that's a really good handbook to understand the tradeoffs for a hundred, I guess, research methods. Really, in research you only – At least in my world, I only really use five. But that was a really helpful book to study with as I was going through my projects. So that was a huge book.

Also just learning – Going to a lot of internal talks. I'm also somebody who likes to brainstorm a lot. So if I'm like, "I want to move forward with this. I want to do this method." It helps me a lot from a learning perspective for somebody to poke holes in my argument. Like, "Well, would you do that if this happened? Or what about this problem?" And so helping me think deeply and thoroughly I needed a thought partner or a sounding board as I was thinking through which method to use or which proposal to go with. And that's what Nithia gave me, which is kind of that sounding board and for her to say, "I don't know if I would use that method because of X, Y and Z." And for me to defend that or for me to be like, "You know what? You're right. Maybe I should use a different one," and help me think again more thoroughly about my decisions was really helpful in terms of those resources.

[00:18:22] TG: Also, too, imagine that as an HR analyst, there's some UX practices that were already incorporated, because I mean that's how you came about into UX because you're kind of doing surveys and things like that on the job. Is there anything else that comes to mind as far as like similarities between when you're an HR analyst to UX researcher?

[00:18:40] MR: Oh, yes. A hundred percent. I'm so grateful. Even though HR was not the goal or the target initially, I am also a firm believer in God and I believe that everything happens for a reason. And I know that I can directly thank being in HR for helping me understand analytics. As a researcher, that's my first go-to. So every type of study I have, whether at my current company or really anywhere, I first ask for any raw data sets that they have. So if there's any spreadsheets, or dashboards, or if I need to code really quickly. And, again, like very small type of code in SQL or in Tableau, I'm able to do that because of the experience I had in HR. So just the quantitative side and being able to understand metrics.

A lot of UX researchers, qualitative researchers, don't have that experience and don't have that skill set. So just that kind of quant first and kind of mixed method world that I'm in, I 100% attribute to being an HR analyst. And I also would just say this is kind of a given, but the people skills. I find that researchers sometimes can be super focused on the script. Like we're answering question one, then question two, then question three. Where, from HR, I realized that it's more of a conversation. You have to get to know people as people and be personable so that they can feel comfortable with you. So that by the they ask their questions, they trust you and there's a rapport built there, and the conversation is a little bit more genuine. And the better genuine you are, I feel like the better data it is. And so you're getting to the root of what they're really thinking versus being very stuffy, and very hard, and very cold and they're just giving you the answers that you want to hear. So I feel like that skill set of understanding people, being empathetic, listening to people, being an active listener, those are all things I attribute to being in HR, for sure.

[00:20:36] TG: Yeah. Active listening I think is something a lot of people struggle with. I have Vivian Castillo previously on the podcast. And she comes from a therapist background. And she was saying that is definitely a struggle that she dealt with in the industry of getting people to be more empathetic.

[00:20:54] MR: [inaudible 00:20:54] I love her.

[00:20:57] TG: Yeah, I know. She's amazing. So I know you say you gather things like raw data whenever you get onto a project. Is there any other examples of how someone can tap more into quantitative data as far as like it being resourceful to the research?

[00:21:15] MR: Yeah. So there are different pillars within research as I understand them. At least at Google there was in that compass. There's a qualitative researcher and then there's a quantitative researcher. The quant researchers, I think, are more like statisticians, where they are really deep into regression charts and finding the R value, P value, all that. That's not my lane, but those are kind of stat-heavy folks. And if you're interested in crunching numbers and doing surveys, that's more of a quant method, then that is the space where most researchers would fall into when they're actually doing, like I said, like modeling and all that.

But for folks who are qualitative or hoping to have a mix of both, I think just understanding pivot tables, understanding how to find patterns within numerical data. Even just running a quick little P-value study, or a statistical significant study, or an ANOVA. Kind of like that early stat 101 that you would get in college is always helpful, even just to brush up on it, because it helps you have a better understanding of which variable you're searching for. Whether it's in qualitative or quantitative research, it helps you have a better understanding of what your hypothesis will be and what areas you need to test to prove whether or not your hypothesis holds true. So I think those early stage, entry level stat classes and the concepts that are discussed in those courses can be really helpful to any researcher, qualitative or definitely quantitative for sure.

[00:22:45] TG: So as a researcher, in your own opinion, do you value one set of data more than the other, like qualitative versus quantitative? As far as like it being able to prove whatever the need is for the user better?

[00:23:00] MR: That's a good question. I feel like it really depends on the research goals as to which method is more effective or more valuable. So I guess if they want to just have – Like if you want a large sample size. This goes to the kind of knowing which method is best with that book. If you want a large sample size, you probably want to do a survey that's more of a quant-heavy type of study. But if you want to hear more of the stories as to why people think the way

they are or why they behave the way they do, you go more for a qualitative method, which is interviews.

I, personally, while I understand the value of the project might be one of the two. The reason why I got into research in general is because I love to hear, and to tell, and to give a platform to people who amplifies the said voices of people who otherwise would not have a voice. And so I love to tell the story. I love to tell the quotes. I love to paint the picture. I like to, even my presentations, take people through a journey. Before I was a researcher, before I did public policy at Duke, I used to write plays. I was very heavy in the kind of writing world. I even want to be an actress at once. So just being immersed in storytelling is something that is really important. And it's just part of who I am. And so for me, the qualitative work is more interesting to me because I feel like I tell a more holistic story that way.

[BREAK]

[00:24:27] TG: Let's take a short break.

So one of the top questions I get about product design is how do I stay inspired? And the other day I decided to take inventory of what I'm doing routinely. The biggest thing that stood out to me was how I'm always investing time to understand products that are advancing in design and technology. Today's sponsor, Google Design, produces original content like articles and videos to show how Google's products come to life, and to inspire designers everywhere. On Google Design, you'll get to know how the products used by billions actually get made. And hear from desires behind some of your favorite products like Chrome, Google Maps, and Nest. Head over to design.google to get inspired. That's design.google. Or follow them on Twitter and Instagram @GoogleDesign.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:25:23] TG: So I'd like to take a second to have you reflect back on how far you've come. You've had such a journey to become a UX researcher. And now you've been in the game for a little while now. What's one of the biggest challenges you've had to overcome while progressing towards your dream job?

[00:25:41] MR: Ooh! Also, I don't know if there's one. There are so many challenges. I think, for sure, my story's a little bit unique because I'm self-taught, right? So I don't have a master's. I don't have a PhD. And of course that's going to question my credibility and just my eligibility for being a researcher in a lot of places. So I think, for me, it was going over the hurdle of prove to us that you're a researcher without having the credentials that most researchers do. Most people in my field at least have a master's. In certain cases at Google, they all have PhD's. So doing this work without any of those accolades is challenging because people are always questioning like, "Oh, you're self-taught? Interesting." So that's definitely I think one of my challenges.

And at Google, my challenge to getting to the goal of even being a researcher was just the risk of, I guess, at that point it was not having a guaranteed role. I had to take a risk in going to moving from Oakland to New York to work on a team part-time even though I as a full-time employee without having a guaranteed seat in that team. So there's a lot of uncertainty within the role. Because, again, I didn't have that master' sand they were trying to figure out whether or not I was actually eligible to do the work that I wanted to do. If I could actually make that diagonal ladder transfer, which I ultimately did. But I do think those challenges were really overcome. We definitely talk about mentorship. But 100% because of sponsorship as well, I was able to build a strong connection with a lot of directors and a lot of researchers, a lot of people who could write for me. I did a lot of work for them on the side. So while I also was benefiting from my mentorship, I think what helped me overcome a lot of those challenges was the connection I had with my sponsors at Google and outside of Google to get me to where I am now.

[00:27:35] TG: I think something that makes your story so interesting is that I feel like you're one of the trailblazers. Like people will look back 10 years from now and they'll realize like, "Oh, yeah." Or they will have already realized, because they'll be the people that will see that you can get into this career as a UX researcher without a degree. And I just know that this is going to inspire someone else that it's possible with the hard work, the dedication, and the skill. As long as you have those three things, if you put your mind to it, you can achieve it. And I mean, I'm hoping that whoever's listening right now that's doubting themselves. Like hearing Morgan's story here today will show you that it's possible.

[00:28:16] MR: Yeah. And I want to super, super underscore that, because there were so many times – My journey at Google was essentially a four-year battle to get to UX research. And there were so many times. It was kind of cliche. But there are so many times when someone told me no, because I didn't have a master's or because I was too young. I was only three years out of school. Or I just didn't have the background that would lend itself. I wasn't in psychology. I was in public policy. Like there were so many reasons as to why I wasn't "qualified". And so many people told me just, "You'll just be fine with HR. Just go ahead in HR and we'll figure it out later." And so I would say yes to all those things that you need to get into this field. Not necessarily a degree. But definitely ambition and persistence.

And I think had I not persisted through recruiters telling me no, and Google telling me no, and even sometimes mentors being like, "Well, I don't know if you'll be able to do that." And I had to believe in myself to really fight through some of these challenges and a lot of anxious moments to get to where I am, which is not even complete. I just was able to get to the ladder and get to become a minted UX researcher. I have a long, long way to go. But just to get my foot in the door and to stand strong as a researcher. That took a lot, a lot of prayer and persistence, for sure.

So if anybody is doubting themselves because you're not – You feel like you're not enough. You don't know enough. You haven't done enough. You don't have enough credentials. I would 100% write all that down on a little piece of paper and then crumple it up, and throw it away, or burn it, because the opportunities to get into UX research are so vast. There are so many ways that you can get into this field. And for whatever reason, I don't know if it's because people in this field usually have like the fancy titles, they make it seem like it's so exclusive. And it's really not. And I just really try to emphasize that for anybody that I'm mentoring or coaching on just how false that narrative is and how it is so possible for you to do this work without having a higher level degree.

[00:30:25] TG: Yeah, and I think in a way, it's just some people feeling prestigious and wanting to gatekeep the industry and keep out diversity for being completely honest.

[00:30:34] MR: Definitely. Because I'm definitely the only one. So, yeah.

[00:30:39] TG: Yeah. Yes. Please, y'all, don't take no for an answer. Just keep going at it. If this is really what you're dreaming about, keep at it. I'm sure a lot of listeners and people that have gotten into UX in general understand like the struggle of working while studying UX. It takes a lot of energy to keep it up. So how are you able to manage your time?

[00:31:00] MR: My time in terms of learning while also doing my actual job?

[00:31:03] TG: Yeah. Because, I mean, it was kind of like intertwined in a way.

[00:31:06] MR: Yeah. So that's a great question, because my managers told me that, at Google, this is another thing. Well, I'll get to that point in a second. But they were telling me like you have to do 100% in your role. And you can't take on what we call 20% projects, which is these ad hoc projects I was doing for research. Some managers were cool with it. Other managers weren't. And so for the ones that weren't, I was like, "Okay, that's fine." And after work, I would usually work for a couple hours on my research projects. And it was an ideal course, because I was like I wanted to go out. Or on the weekends, I would do some things. Or even when I'm coming early to do some of the research work for those managers who said I couldn't do it 20%. So I just had to craft out more time to work on the stuff I wanted to work on in those events where I couldn't work on it as a 20% project in addition to my core work. So I just was super diligent and dedicated to doing it out of office time zones or time periods for sure.

[00:32:04] TG: Yeah. I think your unconventional story of changing your career from HR analyst to UX researcher is an inspiring example to not give up when you put your mind to a goal. And you needed to be resilient to those people that told you this whole time that the goal wasn't achievable. And they can – I'm not going to say that. I was about to say something really rude.

[00:32:25] MR: No. I'll tell you. I hear it. Because, yes –

[00:32:27] TG: They can shove it their ass I guess. That's a nicer way to put it. But you're at the point now where you've surpassed that initial goal to just get started and be hired. And now you're working as an artificial intelligence UX researcher at Compass. So how did you get into

AI UX? Was there like any additional training that you needed to be considered for your current role?

[00:32:49] MR: Yeah. So this is a great question, because I interviewed for just the UX researcher position at Compass. But God is good, because I – Nithia, back to the mentor that I was working under and kind of working for, she moved from the Next Billion User Space, which is the space I talked about where I was kind of helping out to a team that was focused more so on AI and AI ethics. And so her team was AI UX. So I learned a little bit more about the challenges that were within AI and how she was addressing it through her research just through our mentorship.

And when I was interviewing for Compass, because I had such a heavy focus on ethics, on underrepresented users at Google, I had more of this holistic understanding of research. They offered me the position to, "Yeah, you can be a researcher. But we are really looking for somebody who is an AI because they're able to think more holistically about an AI product. It's not just about doing the technology or doing the machine learning. It's also how do we make sure that the people that we're giving this trust the tool, how do we make sure that they trust the technology? What are any ethical concerns that we're thinking about? What is their journey, their experience through using this AI tool?" So that was kind of given to me as a blessing and being like, "We are interested because of your background because it's so based in ethics and kind of like that right-brain thinking. We would love to apply that to our AI space." So that's how I was introduced to AI UX from a job perspective. But I did learn a little bit more of it through Nithia in our conversations, in our brainstorming.

[00:34:24] TG: AI is such a niche topic out there that you don't really see many people of color, to be honest.

[00:34:30] MR: Yeah.

[00:34:31] TG: Was it something that you like had a particular passion in or just you saw it and went for it?

[00:34:35] MR: I didn't have an initial passion for it because, again, I didn't really know what it was. But my mission has always been to be in projects and spaces where there is an opportunity for, again, me to amplify unheard voices. And like you said, UX in general, doesn't have a lot of us, and even more specific, AI UX. AI, in general, doesn't have a lot of us. And a lot of the research that I did at Google was evaluating some of those AI products to think about how can we make this product better, more usable for people with darker skin tones? Or how can we make this better for people with strong accents? Like just thinking about diversity. How people from different walks of life interact with a product. In that space, it seems like from what I have been doing, has been AI. And so it's all coming together. And I'm saying this kind of in real time, I've only been at Compass for maybe about six, seven months now. But it's all coming together to see that this is a space that definitely has an appetite and has an opportunity, and the ground is kind of fertile for thinking about some of these more holistic questions around how we can make more inclusive products and how it just seems like AI has to hype around it for these conversations to really land and stick. And it's early stages. It's not something that's super old, and it's kind of archaic and people are moving as we've always done it like this. It's a new space. So I really enjoy being in AI because I think – And now, for sure, maybe it was a thread through all of this. Because if you go back to Google Loon and the Dominican Republic, it was also kind of an AI technology as well. But it has a space and the opportunity for me to craft out that narrative that speaks so much to my mission. Again, I would say it's like I woke up like I'm going to be an AI UX researcher. But the opportunity presented itself for me to bring that narrative to this space.

[00:36:27] TG: And you mentioned that you had like a little bit AI UX training with that mentor previously. Is there anything unexpected or new that you've learned on the job? Anything that's like enlightening?

[00:36:39] MR: And from an AI perspective, in terms of the subject matter or in terms of my work working in AI UX in general?

[00:36:46] MR: Actually, let's say both.

[00:36:48] MR: Okay. I would say, for sure, I'm doing a lot more product management than I would have expected. I love it though. I think I have to make sure that my research speaks to –

I'm also at a "startup". We're kind of a little older than a startup now. But it's a smaller company. So it's not like I can just do research for research sake. I have to make sure that my goals for the research align with the goals for the business. And I'm always constantly – I'm the only researcher in AI. And definitely I'm the only person of color in AI. So a lot of the questions that I'm asking, I have to talk to my product managers and kind of walk them through why this is unethical, or why this is ethical, or why we should think about these from so many different lenses.

So I think there's a portion of education that I have to – Kind of an educator role that I have to assume as well while also not putting the burden on me as a person of color to describe some of these concepts. I think, a lot of times, the challenge of explaining some of these really complex structures rests on our shoulders. And that's not always fair. So I definitely educate to a point where they understand where I'm coming from and they understand my rationale. And then I'll kind of give suggestions for books to read or people follow-up with, because, yeah, I'm also not a critical **[inaudible 00:38:08]**. I don't know. I didn't go to school for any of that. So I want to give the field the justice it deserves. And I don't know too much to be speaking on it as an expert. So I do want to give it its credit and say, "Hey, if you're interested in this more, you should check this out or read this more." So there's more of that education part of it that I didn't think I would have to do as much of. But, definitely, product management, because I'm the only one. And also that education role, for sure, has been very interesting to have those positions within UX research here.

[00:38:41] TG: Is there any advice for those that want to get into AI UX research that you have?

[00:38:47] MR: I think, in terms of AI UX, and just UX in general, I have a feeling that when you learn UX in these boot camps and you learn – Well, UX research in particularly, in these boot camps, you start learning a lot about usability work. And that's like kind of what button should we put to the left? Should we do a yellow button or a green button? And it's very tactical research. And I think that's helpful. I do think that is important.

But I think to be in AI UX and just to be a strong researcher, it's important to ask more foundational questions and really challenge, "Why are we doing this project at all?" And really get into the conversations with the PMs in the beginning of them doing kind of concept design

instead of at the end when they're running just to validate a prototype that they're going to launch anyway.

So I think just for those interested in getting into AI UX is to really push himself to start thinking strategically. Think about foundational questions you want to explore. Think about kind of the why we're doing this. Really get in the very beginning of the life cycle of a product design. Versus what I think sometimes boot camps teach you is kind of like you're the last stop. You're the very end of the assembly line and they just want to check in with research and make sure everything's good to go so they can ship it out. While it's an important skill to have, it's not – As I would define, it's not the whole of UX research. So just getting more comfortable with some of those foundational strategic level questions would be really helpful.

[00:40:15] TG: Yeah. I completely agree. As a UX designer myself, I have been looking at the UX bootcamp curriculum. And that's something I do think they have a lot of faults to as far as like if you're looking to get into UX research. I haven't seen a ton of boot camps out there that have as much in-depth UX research fundamentals. I feel like you'd get a better perspective of that from like a mentor or shadowing someone. But, yeah, a lot of it is about UX usability, as Morgan was saying.

I mean, they do talk a bit about getting into why should we start this product at all. Like asking those like fundamental questions at the beginning. But I think UX research is a whole other beast that UX designers don't entirely grasp until you start to talk to a UX researcher to see what their job entails. Because, I mean, us doing a little like generative research, like that's nothing compared to what ux researchers do.

[00:41:18] MR: Exactly. Exactly. I 100% agree.

[00:41:20] TG: Are there any like other resources that you recommend for people looking to get into UX researchers? Like any books or courses, podcasts, anything?

[00:41:30] MR: Yeah, I would definitely say the 100 methods of universal design was really helpful to kind of just, as I mentioned, kind of know the difference in methods. I would also say go to different research conferences. I don't know what that looks like now in the pandemic

days. But I found that to be more useful than doing any boot camp. The boot camps are great. I think it depends on the type of person you are. I just couldn't justify spending $15,000 when I already had kind of a mentor and a job. Kind of I learned more on the job. So that was helpful for me versus doing kind of a course or a boot camp.

But there are some really great Coursera courses on research and just the scientific method. As long as you know that, I think those are the fundamentals, for sure, that you can brush up on. And I'm trying to think if there's anything else. So I'm in Clubhouse last year. My friend and I and a couple other folks started the UX Research Corner. And that happens every couple of weeks on Clubhouse. And it's usually Wednesdays at 7pm Central Time. And there's one on Saturday at 10am Central Time as well.

And the visionary and the founder of that, her name is **[inaudible 00:42:44]**. She has a YouTube series on how to think about research and your career. And so her YouTube series are also really great to look into. Or even just following the UX Research Corner on Clubhouse would be really great, because that's when we all kind of talk and share our thoughts and perspectives on different methods and how to get into the field. So I would say all those would be helpful options.

[00:43:12] TG: And I'll have all of those links that she recommended in the show notes so that way you guys have easy access to that. Thank you so much for sharing those resources. I know it can be a bit challenging for someone looking to get started. I do shit talk sometimes, boot camps on here, but some of them are good. Don't think like all of them are bad. Some of them are good. It's just a matter of you doing your own research and seeing if that course provides what you need. Some people, they want to have a little bit more design background. So finding the course that provides that for you. Or if you are more heavier on the research side, making sure that you're not going to spend three sections going over a design or something like that. So just tailor it to whatever your needs are.

So you also offer some UX career coaching online. I'd love for you to tell us a little bit about that. What listeners can expect if they book a session with you?

[00:44:02] MR: Yes. So I have a website that you can go to. It's morgancramsey.com. There are two opportunities to have coaching. One is for startup founders. Especially if they're founders of color, I really want to offer my services to help them build out their business with research. So if you're a startup founder and you want some ad hoc coaching for your research, kind of like your pitch, or just data that you need to collect for your series fundraising, I offer my resources so that I can do research for you.

Outside from research consulting, I also have career coaching. And I have mentored I feel like over probably 10 to 15 folks of people who are interested in getting into research. And they've landed at different paying companies, which is kind of Google, Amazon, etc. But that's not to say it's guaranteed now. So I definitely walk through – There are three packages. The first is a resume workshop. So I look at your resume. We go through a exercise, a couple of study, a couple of sessions where I look to see how we can really beef up your resume so that you can have a better chance of being reviewed in some of those portfolio first kind of call reach out sessions.

The second one I offer is the silver package, which is interview preparations. So once you get that foot in the door, once you've signed up for an interview, there is an art to interviewing for UX research and certain questions that they might ask. So I help students work through that as we're preparing for those interviews so that they can feel prepared when going into those sessions.

And then the final one is that at the very end of every UX interview I've ever been through or seen, especially at the top tech companies, they want to do a portfolio review for researchers. And usually portfolio, you think of design. Like you want to see your designs and your images. But researchers, they want to see kind of your story unfold as well. And I've done this myself at Dropbox, Amazon, Audible, Google, Compass. So smaller companies, Etsy a lot of different companies where I've received all of their offers. And I think it's truly because of the six-step method that I follow and I offer in my services to communicate that story clearly and really showcase your talents. So that's what that final package will help you with the interview preparation as well as the portfolio review.

So reaching out to me at morgancramsey.com and kind of taking a look at the services. All of that is up there to see the different package options. And then scrolling to the bottom to work with me would be amazing so I can understand your goals and which package would probably be best for you.

[00:46:40] TG: All right. Make sure to head to Morgan's website, morgancramsey.com. Click on the UX Career Coaching link to book a session with her. If any of you are looking to get into UX research, please go through her, not me, because I'm a unicorn, but I do not know UX research like Morgan does. So if you're looking to have your resume ready for portfolios, interviews, any type of prep that you're doing for job, Morgan can help you out. Just make sure you visit her website at morgancramsey.com and click on the UX Career Coaching link to book a session with her.

Alright, so I want to get into listener questions, but we didn't get any questions this week. But I have a common question that a lot of y'all has asked me previously about UX research. But we did touch on this a little bit about like what resources that you use. And I guess to that book that you covered does this, but if you have any additional comments on this, what resources do you use to learn more about the type of research methods?

[00:47:37] MR: Yeah, I think, for sure that book is helpful. I know I'm kind of touting that book a lot, but it walks you through each method. It will say like page one will say interviews. When you use them and when you don't. When it's helpful. When it's not. And it will only be like a page or two, and then you'll flip to the next method. So I think it was helpful to have a succinct understanding of each method and kind of distilling that was really, really helpful.

I will also say, I didn't mention this, but in my story, the key thread in terms of getting here are the people I've connected to. So reaching out to other researchers. There's also no one right method. Somebody did tell me that. There are better methods to use than others. But if you can stand your ground and say this is the method I want to use because of X, Y and Z reason, and it's sound, then it's the right method for the research you want to do. And every researcher will have a different perspective on how they would ask a question or how they would phrase a sentence. And there's no one right way to do it. There are definitely some considerations of

things. So like, for example, not asking a bias question. But giving yourself that ability to be creative, I think, is still important.

And so I think talking to people, seeing how they think about a certain question and how they think about a certain method is really helpful so that you can start thinking about, "Well, what is my spin on this going to be? What is my touch as a researcher? How do I want to think about it make it mine?" So I would definitely add the people and connecting with folks and picking their brain on how they would think their methods would be as helpful as well.

[00:49:09] TG: Alright. So I'll have that book that she mentioned linked in the show notes. It's called Universal Methods of Design. As a reminder, you could be included in next episode. Make sure to follow me on Instagram @uinarrative. I randomly ask questions about whatever types of questions you have for our next guest. So you could be featured in an upcoming episode if you leave a comment on the post.

So I like to end the show with a random question that's completely unrelated to what we've been talking about. Assuming expenses were paid, what country would you want to visit for six months?

[00:49:43] MR: Uh! This is literally the hardest question. I thought about this, and I was like, "Okay, it will probably be somewhere I haven't been." And the only area of the world, the only continent I haven't been to is Asia." So I feel like there's so many countries I want to go there. But then I was like, "But, no. Wouldn't you want to be somewhere where it's like you're on the beach and you're chilling?" I'm like, "Maybe I'll go back to DR, because I love food." So I'm like maybe it would be the Dominican Republic.

But I will say that – I was in Ireland for six months, and that was transformative just for my own self-confidence and just me becoming a researcher. So it might be there. I honestly – I'm the worst of this question. I travel so much and I just don't have a favorite. But I will say that I loved being in Montenegro. It's a random country. I don't know if I would spend all six months, but I did have such a phenomenal experience with the people there and just that part of the world. And there's a little lake that you can swim in. And they listen to R&B. And it's just really an appreciative – There's a strong appreciation for black culture there. I think I would probably go

there. But you never know in the next hour. I might change my mind. Or Brazil. I absolutely **[inaudible 00:50:56]**. So there's just so many options. I don't even know how to answer that question. I hope that helps.

[00:51:02] TG: Yeah, it's a hard question. I was thinking about it for a while too. And I actually landed on DR as well. I've only been there once. But I had an amazing time. And everyone thought I was Dominican. It was great. It's like I fit right in.

[00:51:18] MR: Yes. Actually the reason why I did my research project in the DR, because I wanted to be more of a fly on the wall versus sticking out as like, "She's a researcher here. She's here to evaluate us." I really want to see and experience as much as possible just people doing their everyday things and their everyday life and me not being a disturbance. Because when I went there, people thought I was Dominican as well. So it was great to kind of be a fly. Until I started speaking and they're like **[inaudible 00:51:43].** But yeah, 100%. If you go to DR, I'll come with you, because –

[00:51:50] TG: Oh, yeah. I would just eat the whole time. I love Dominican food.

[00:51:52] MR: Okay. Oh my gosh! That's all I did when I was there. Just eat food.

[00:51:58] TG: Where can we connect with you online?

[00:52:01] MR: Definitely LinkedIn. I would say, I'm sure, my email's a little bit long. So people usually don't connect with that. But LinkedIn would be the best way to get me. Send me a DM in LinkedIn. I also have Twitter, but I don't really check it that often, nor Instagram. So I would say 100% reach out to me LinkedIn and I will connect with you and we can take it from there, for sure.

[00:52:23] TG: Awesome. So if you guys have any questions or comments about today's episode, make sure to tag Morgan on their social channels and tag @uinarrative on Instagram, or Twitter @uinarrativeco. And also, don't forget to share this episode with anyone that you think would benefit from it. Anyone interested in AI UX, please send them our way.

Thank you so much, Morgan, for taking some time to talk to us all about AI. Like this is such an interesting topic, and it was such a pleasure having this conversation with you.

[00:52:54] MR: Of course. And please, please reach out. There are not that many of us in this field. And so it is one of my biggest missions as well to get more of us in this field. So please do not feel worried, or shy. Feel free to reach out. I will respond, I promise. I want to get us in this field. Our perspective is so rich and so beautiful. So it's just is an honor to even share my platform on your incredible podcast. Tolu, I'm so proud of you. And yeah, feel free to reach out to me, because I want to be a resource just like all those people were a resource for me.

[00:53:25] TG: You guys heard her. Don't be shy. I'll have her LinkedIn and other social channels in the show notes.

[00:53:31] MR: Yes. Thank you so much.

[OUTRO]

[00:53:35] TG: Thank you for listening to the UI Narrative podcast. If you like what you hear, make sure to show this podcast in love by commenting and subscribing where you listen. You can find me on Instagram and Facebook @uinarrative, or Twitter @uinarrativeco. I also respond to emails at hello@uinarrative.com. Talk to you later. Bye.

[END]