

Granting Access: Dismantling Ableism and Embracing Autistic Identity

HALEY MOSS, ESQ.



The Personal: Overcoming Barriers to Access

Childhood Journey Through Autism

- ▶ Diagnosed with Autism at age 3:
 - ▶ Nonverbal
 - ▶ Completing large jigsaw puzzles
 - ▶ Lack of social engagement
- ▶ Mainstreamed in kindergarten
 - ▶ Transition from echolalia
 - ▶ Development of novel speech



Chronological Order & The Alphabet

- ▶ Development generally follows a linear path
 - ▶ In autism, not so much...



kelsey
@silence__kit

Some baby on this plane is singing the ABCs all out of order and a guy just shouted "yes girl remix!!"

Growing Into Who I Am Today

- ▶ Learning I was autistic and development of disability identity
- ▶ Writing as a means of communication and way to give back to others
- ▶ Self-advocacy and feeling empowered to use my voice



Journey to Attorney and Beyond

- ▶ Graduated from law school in 2018
- ▶ Passing the bar exam
- ▶ “Florida’s first openly autistic attorney”
 - ▶ How do we tell stories about disability?
- ▶ My first job: litigator
- ▶ Opening a disability conversation in legal





A Shift in Perspective: From The Open Personal Story to the Open World

What Are People With Disabilities Overcoming?

- ▶ Their disability?
- ▶ Challenges associated with their disability?
- ▶ Low expectations?
- ▶ Stereotypes and prejudices?
- ▶ Self-doubt and a lack of confidence?
- ▶ Inaccessibility?
- ▶ The presumption of incompetence?

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation

- All brains work differently – whether you are **neurotypical** or **neurodivergent**
- Neurodivergence includes differences in communication & thinking
- 1 in 7 people can be considered neurodivergent

Neurodivergent individuals include those with Autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, Tourette Syndrome, intellectual disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, and acquired cognitive disabilities.



That All Sounds
Great.

What About
Dismantling
Barriers to Access
and Inclusion?





Barriers to Disability and Neurodiversity Inclusion



Ableism



Nondisclosure



Masking

Stigma & Microaggressions



Microaggressions are rooted in ableism. **Ableism** is prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination against people with disabilities. A lot of ableism is entrenched in the belief neurodivergent people are “broken” and need to be “fixed” and act more neurotypical.

Ableism as a Barrier to Access and Inclusion

- ▶ **Ableism** is a prejudice against people with disabilities
- ▶ Can also be stereotyping and discriminating against people or treating them negatively because of their disabilities
- ▶ Ableism can be internal or external, conscious or not
 - ▶ Think about your events, places you go, what is and isn't accessible for disabled folks

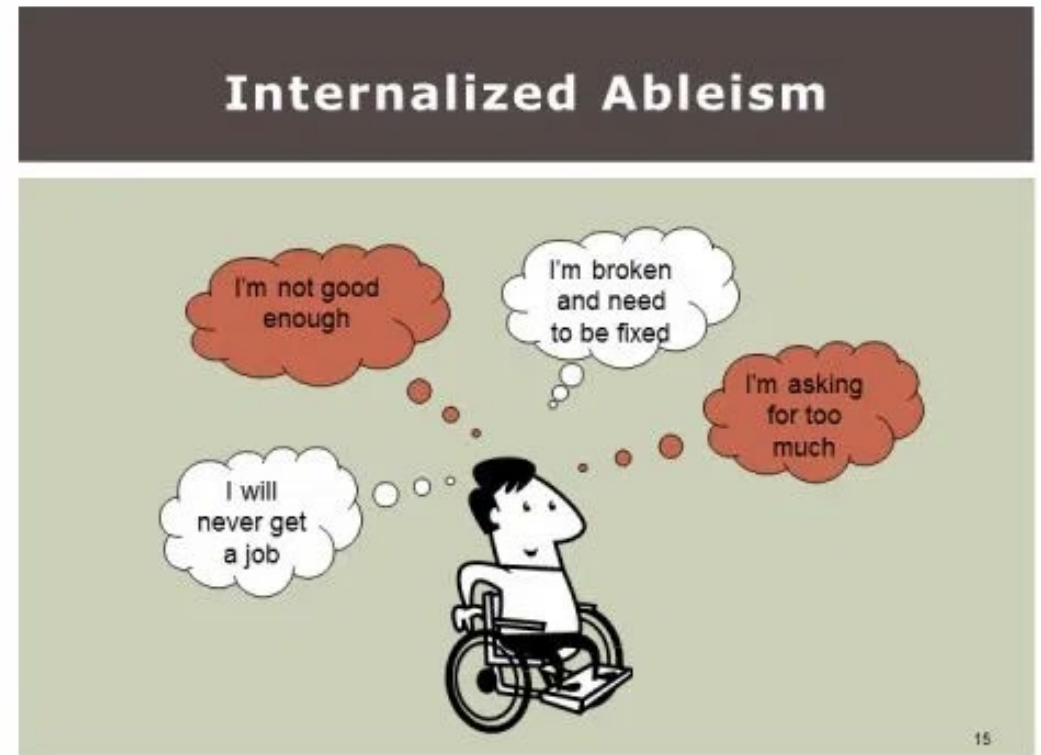


The Sneaky One: Benevolent Ableism



Nondisclosure as a Barrier to Access and Inclusion

- ▶ **Disclosure** is a personal decision
- ▶ Why wouldn't someone disclose?
 - ▶ Fear of being perceived as weak
 - ▶ Avoid perception of receiving special treatment
 - ▶ Internalized ableism and negative self-talk
 - ▶ Preexisting stereotypes
 - ▶ Potential discrimination



Masking as a Barrier to Access and Inclusion

- ▶ **Masking** is taking on a persona that is felt to be more neurotypical.
- ▶ **Camouflaging** is hiding behavior that might be viewed as socially unacceptable or “performing” social behavior that is felt to be more neurotypical.
- ▶ **Motivation** for masking may be different across cultural and gender groups



Allowing Me To Be My Best Self

- ▶ Interests and passions define **identity and self-confidence**
 - ▶ Especially if full-time occupation
- ▶ Improved education/acceptance of neurodiversity in general population would reduce need for camouflaging
 - ▶ Some worry that if people recognize that autistics are camouflaging, maybe that will cause problems in the workplace
 - ▶ A better idea is to **“treat the environment”** to reduce stigma and barriers to social life



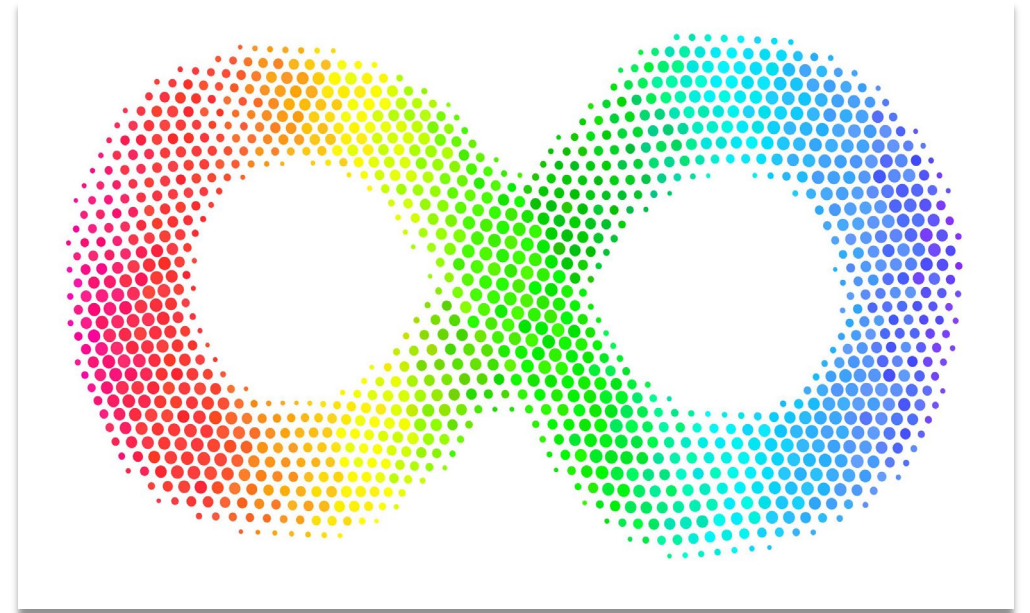
Finding Community & Culture

- ▶ Autistic and disabled people were the original online community builders and organizers
- ▶ **#ActuallyAutistic**
- ▶ **#NeurodiverseSquad**
- ▶ How autistic people might act in autistic spaces is different than in neurotypical spaces
- ▶ Neurotypical “guests” with **#AskingAutistics**



Discovering Autistic Culture

- ▶ Autistic culture is...
 - ▶ Unmasking
 - ▶ Celebrating our uniqueness
 - ▶ Info-dumping
 - ▶ Stimming
 - ▶ Laughing, crying, and feeling with people who “get it”



What If We Took a Strengths-Based Approach?



Attention to Detail

- Thoroughness
- Accuracy



Deep Focus

- Concentration
- Freedom from distraction



Absorb & Retain Facts

- Excellent long term memory and recall



Expertise

- In-depth knowledge
- High level of skills



Integrity

- Honesty, loyalty
- Commitment



Creativity

- Distinctive Imagination
- Expression of ideas

Being Inclusive of Neurodiversity

- ▶ Start from the top down with openness and vulnerability
- ▶ Align people to their strengths
- ▶ Having open and meaningful communication
- ▶ Implementing universal design principles
- ▶ Encouraging neurodiverse mentorship and leadership
 - ▶ Neurodivergent people advancing in careers
 - ▶ Helping with recruitment, event planning, trainings



Say Hello!



- ▶ Email: haley@haleymoss.com
- ▶ LinkedIn: Haley Moss, Esq.
- ▶ Facebook: <http://facebook.com/haleymossart>
- ▶ Twitter: @haleymossart
- ▶ Instagram: @haley.moss