



**DirectEmployers  
Association**

# Breaking the Disability Stereotypes and Allowing People Be Themselves

Haley Moss

# Accessibility Notes

This webinar strives to be as **inclusive** as possible!

No one person can grant or gatekeep access. Access is something we **create together**.

We should have **captions and transcripts** if you need them.

If you need to take a break, log off, answer phone calls, stand up, twiddle your fingers, fidget, or feel overwhelmed – **go for it!**

If you would like a copy of these slides, the images have **alt text** and should be **screen reader accessible** too. 😊

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# Before we get started...

- What **stigmas & stereotypes** do you associate with:
  - Mental health conditions?
  - Learning disabilities?
  - Physical disabilities?
  - Chronic illnesses?
- Think about **disability's impact** in your life:
  - Do you know a person with a disability?
  - What do you admire about them?

# What is Disability?

- ❑ According to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990:
  - A **physical or mental impairment** which **substantially limits** a **major life activity**. Major life activities are functions important to most people's daily lives, which can include:
    - Concentrating
    - Communicating
    - Reading
    - Moving



# The Americans with Disabilities Act

❑ The ADA is a comprehensive, federal civil rights law that **prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities.**

❑ The ADA is divided into **five titles**:

I. Employment

II. U.S. state and local government services

III. Public accommodations

IV. Telecommunications

V. Miscellaneous



❑ The ADA allows people with disabilities to be part of their communities!

❑ Since we work in employment contexts, we're mostly focused on Title I.

# Disability Pride Month!

- ❑ Created in celebration of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act
- ❑ Celebrating disability as diversity
- ❑ Recognizing unique disability cultures



The Disability Pride Flag was created by Ann Magill, a disabled woman, and each element symbolizes a different part of the disability community.

**The Black Field:** this field represents disabled people who have lost their lives due not only to their illness, but also to negligence, suicide and eugenics.

**The Colors:** Each color on this flag represents a different aspect of disability or impairment.

- Red:** physical disabilities
- Yellow:** cognitive and intellectual disabilities
- White:** invisible and undiagnosed disabilities
- Blue:** mental illness
- Green:** sensory perception disabilities

# Stigma and Microaggressions

“Everybody’s a little autistic. We’re all on the spectrum.”

“Why don’t you understand that? It’s so easy!”

“I never would have known if you didn’t tell me.”



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.



# able·ism

/ˈābəˌlɪzəm/ noun

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A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.

This systemic oppression that leads to people and society determining people's value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, "health/wellness", and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, "excel" and "behave."

You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

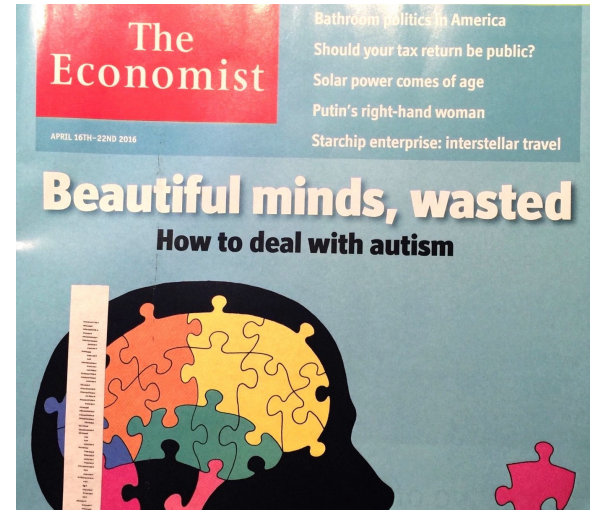
working definition by @TalilaLewis, updated January 2022, developed in community with disabled Black/negatively racialized folk, especially @NotThreeFifths. Read more: [bit.ly/ableism2022](https://bit.ly/ableism2022)

# Understanding Ableism

- ❑ **Ableism** is a prejudice against people with disabilities
- ❑ Can also be stereotyping and discriminating against people or treating them negatively because of their disabilities
- ❑ You do not have to be disabled or neurodivergent to experience ableism
- ❑ 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



# Benevolent Ableism



# Internalized Ableism

## Internalized Ableism



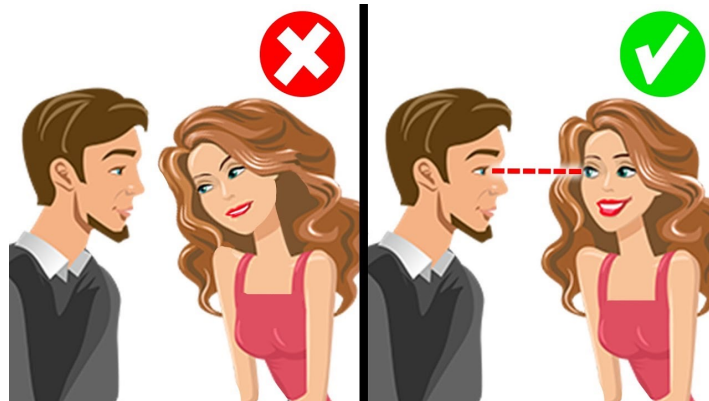
# Concealing Disability and Neurodiversity

- ❑ **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.
- ❑ A lot of this boils down to “**passing**” as nondisabled or appearing less disabled
- ❑ **Motivation** for masking may be different across cultural and gender groups



# What Are Masking Behaviors?

- ❑ Mimicking other people's social behavior
- ❑ Forced eye contact/smiling
- ❑ Adjusting tone of voice or how they speak to match others
- ❑ Suppressing stims
- ❑ Prepared scripts/ideas of how to act or talk to others
- ❑ Abandoning mobility aids or forgoing necessary accommodations



# The “Price” of Masking

- ❑ People (especially those who are marginalized) go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed often because of masking
- ❑ Mental and physical exhaustion that can lead to burnout or meltdowns
- ❑ Suppressing stimming and other coping and regulating mechanisms
- ❑ Depression and anxiety
- ❑ Internalized ableism
- ❑ Loss of identity/who you are
- ❑ Inauthentic social acceptance



# 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



(Bargiela et al., 2016; Bargiela, 2019)



# Beyond Stereotypes: Unmasking and Being Ourselves

- ❑ Revisiting our conversation about stereotypes - what can we do differently?
- ❑ Disability is not a monolith, but a collection of communities
- ❑ Avoid making assumptions and **presume competence**
- ❑ Ditch the “inspiration porn” narrative
- ❑ Learn about disability history and culture



# Let's Stay in Touch!



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