



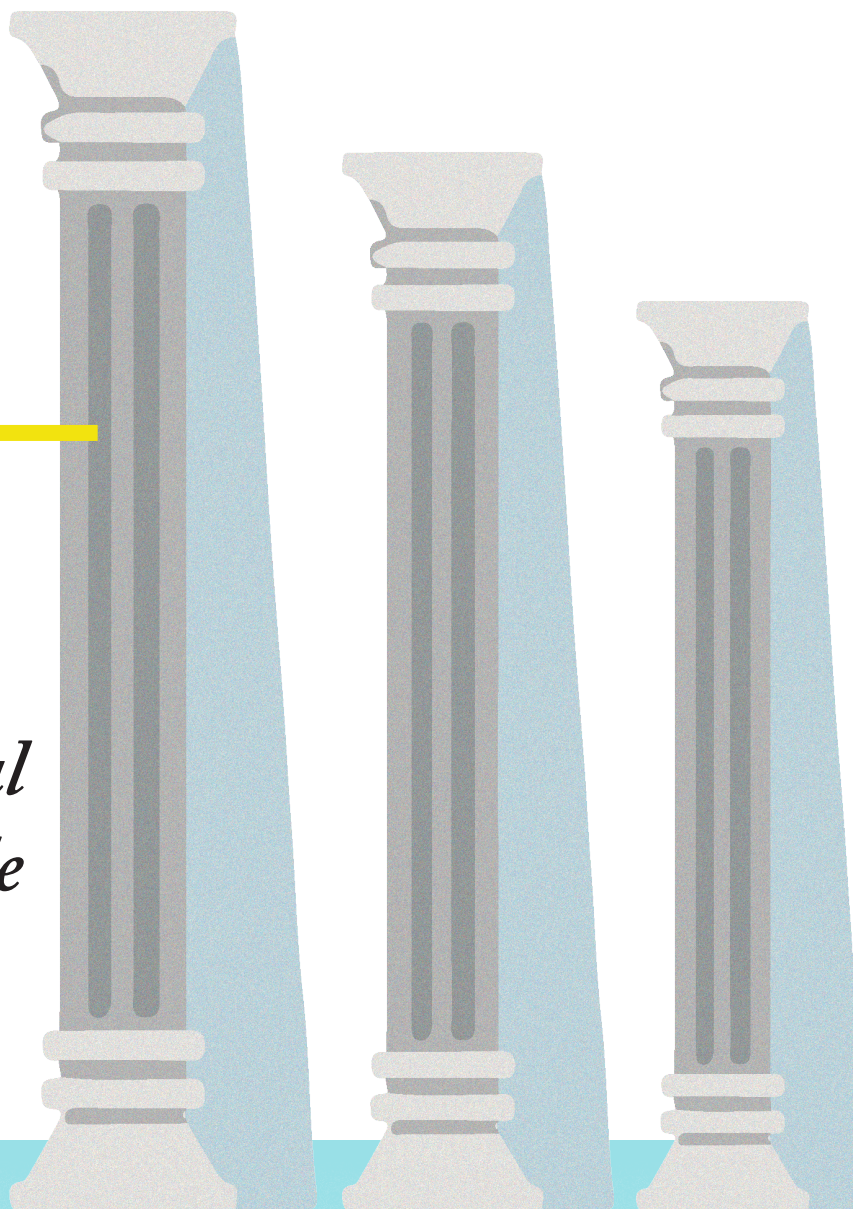
WHEN SYSTEMS COLLIDE—BE A PILLAR FOR INCLUSION AND CARE

After Session Resources

ISDI Presents:

Grappling with Cultural Humility for the Intersectional Person with Invisible Disabilities

Session 5, September 24, 2019

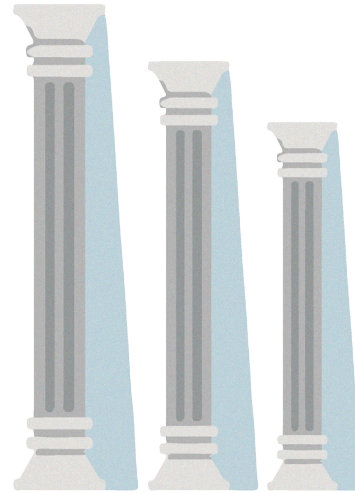


PRESENTER: CHRISTIANA OBEYSUMNER, MNPL



ISDI
INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

ABOUT THE 2019 SERIES



Inside and outside organizations today—we are watching systems collide. Systems once assumed to be stable and predictable are no longer, their parts and wholes called into question, challenged, even thrown out. The pace is fierce and rapid.

How do we ensure that the values of diversity, equity and inclusion prevail when systems collide? How do we maximize the upsides and minimize the downsides for employees, teams and leaders? What can we do to care for one another and create a greater sense of belonging where everyone feels safe to take risks and strive for innovation that our companies and organizations require?

First, we believe we must act as Pillars for Inclusion: A pillar implies strength and reliable support. As a Pillar for Inclusion, we are advocates for change—we challenge inequities in systems, policies, practices, and behaviors. We stand up as role models everyday. People trust us and know they can rely on us.

Second, we must act as Pillars of Care: Again, as a pillar, we provide reliable support. We are committed to caring for others—our teammates, our co-workers, our colleagues, and our leaders. We focus on the things we have in common: the desire to belong, to be treated with respect and fairness, to have our voices heard, to be successful. We advocate for the right for all to

thrive, learn and grow. Each one of us makes a commitment to be an ally—to stand in solidarity, especially with those less privileged than we are.

The theme for 2019 NW Diversity Learning Series is, **When Systems Collide—Be A Pillar for Inclusion and Care.** The purpose of this Series is to make progress on some of the intractable challenges we face with equity and inclusion, and how to instill care in the process. The outcomes we seek are inclusive climates where trust grows, civility reigns, relationships flourish, and performance rises!

Methodology for 2019 – Applied Improv!

For 2019, we will use the games and activities of Applied Improv, inviting participants to embody the learning of each topic—to act it out, to demonstrate it, to turn it into movement. By using more active, interactive, experiential learning, we hope to inspire practices that are sustainable.

“Play the games, and you may find yourself on a trip to the intuitive and perhaps beyond that to the human spirit itself, the oracle.”

—Viola Spolin



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2019

SESSIONS & DATES

SESSION 1: TUES, JANUARY 29, 2019

Striving to Achieve Equity In Organizations: The Next Level of Change

SESSION 2: TUES, MARCH 12, 2019

Leading With Equity: Rooting Out Bias Deep and Wide

SESSION 3: TUES, MAY 14, 2019

Mending the Broken Trust Between Black Women and White Women

SESSION 4: TUES, JUNE 25, 2019

Reconciliation: Building Allyship Between Black Men and White Men

SESSION 5: TUES, SEPTEMBER 24, 2019

Grappling With Cultural Humility for the Intersectional Person With Invisible Disabilities

SESSION 6: TUES, NOVEMBER 12, 2019

Communicating in Polarizing Times: Words Matter!

GRAPPLING WITH CULTURAL HUMILITY FOR THE INTERSECTIONAL PERSON WITH INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

DESCRIPTION:

"Invisible Disabilities is only one thread in the tapestry of the holistic lived experience of the intersectional person," says ChrisTiana Obeyesumner, presenter of this session.

The "intersectional person" refers to how all of the threads of our tapestry—or the many overlapping identities we each have—come together in the design of our holistic being in the world. However, our society has a tendency to focus on one identity at a time, not how each of our identities are interwoven.

With invisible disabilities, or any identity that is not lived "out loud," losing sight of this extremely important thread and identity is more common than it should ever be.

In this training, we will lead a conversation on invisible disabilities from the perspective of intersectionality, and with a lens of cultural humility. The workshop will include opportunities to hear from others who share these lived experiences, as well as cultural humility exercises to learn how you can sustain the tapestry of people with invisible and intersectional disabilities, not snare or snag through inequity.

Why is Cultural Humility such important learning for all equity and inclusion efforts?

Cultural humility is the lifelong commitment to increasing awareness of self and our impacts on others through a praxis, (or cycle of practice) of four pillars:

1. Lifelong self evaluation and critique,
2. Lifelong learning and growth,
3. Evaluation of "power-over" dynamics, and elimination of those that are oppressive or marginalizing, and amplification and allyship to those most affected by inequity or injustice, *and*
4. Continually working to dismantle oppressive and harmful systems and dynamics.

"When it comes to intersectional disability justice, especially for folks with invisible disabilities, cultural humility is the foundation to create an equitable and inclusive workplace from the core outward," says Ms. Obeyesumner. Often, this topic focuses on how able-bodied or "neurotypical" (those who have minds and brains that fall within the 'average') can empower, support, or encourage disabled or neurodivergent people in the workplace.

But many people with disabilities feel they can take care of themselves—it's others' behavior and attitudes, or the workplace environment or systems, that become a barrier. This dynamic of "the social model of disability" is one of the main foundations for creating an equitable and inclusive workplace for people with invisible and intersectional disabilities. This workshop will provide tools for all employees and managers to move from well-intentioned to well-aware, and set accountability benchmarks and measures through culturally humble practices.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Learn key connections between social equity, justice, invisible and intersectional disabilities
- Acquire tools to increase awareness and mindfulness of one's (un)conscious impacts that may create barriers for people with invisible and intersectional disabilities
- Broaden their perspectives by listening to the relevant histories and narratives of the lived experiences of people with invisible and intersectional disabilities
- Gain an overview of cultural humility and its importance in equitable inclusion
- Discover tools and exercises for how to move toward a more inclusive and equitable workplace for people with invisible and intersectional disabilities.



ABOUT THE PRESENTER

CHRISTIANA OBEYSUMNER

Christiana ObeySumner, MNPL, is a social equity advocate, educator, and consultant. Christiana's pronouns are they, them, theirs.

They are the founders of Epiphanies of Equity: Education and Consulting, and The Eleanor Elizabeth Institute for Black Empowerment.

For almost two decades, they have dedicated their life and career to amplifying the importance of social equity—particularly narrative identity development and its role in cultural humility and allyship, intersectional disability justice, bringing awareness to the lived experience of racialized ableism and externalizing antiblackness, and dismantling the psychosocial paradigms that underlie social injustice and inaction.

Their process is based in their lived experience as an Autistic and disabled, Black and Indigenous, Femme-presenting yet fluid person, as well as over a decade of formal study in social and existential psychology and counseling methods, nonprofit leadership, public policy and administration.

They also hold several positions of community organizing leadership, including co-chairing the Seattle Renters and Seattle Disabilities Commissions, V.P. of Education for Seattle University's Black Alumni Association, and serving on the King County Metro Transit Advisory Council.

Ms. ObeySumner has worked with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Menchie's/ MidiCi's Pizza HQ, Seattle Office of Civil Rights, and Wizards of the Coast, among others. She also served as the social impact consultant for the Seattle Opera during its 2017/2018 season.

ABOUT THE PANELISTS



CHRISTY ABRAM

Christy Abram is a best-selling author, advocate, and founder of self-care initiatives Brown Girls Write and Wild Women Wellness.

For over a decade, Christy has dedicated her life to helping women of color speak their truth and claim their personal power. Inspired by her journey, Christy uses storytelling to teach women and youth how to scribe bold narratives and amplify their voices. Her straight-talking approach to self-care offers participants a direct and uncensored space for reflection and sisterhood.

Her breakout novel, *Little Miss Somebody*, is an Amazon best-seller and recipient of the In the Margins, “Best Youth Fiction” award. Christy’s release, *Speak your Truth, Heal your Heart: The Broken Girl’s Guide to Radical Self-care*, is full of concrete tips to help trauma survivors identify generational cycles, recognize their hopes, and pursue their dreams.

Join Christy’s mission of helping 100,000 women of color heal, by visiting her online at www.browngirlswrite.org or on Facebook as Brown Girls Write or Wild Women Wellness.



RACHEL SETZER

Rachel Setzer is an artist and activist for disability, 2SLGBTQ+, and indigenous rights, who also promotes Worldwide Indigenous Solidarity, worker solidarity, and protecting religious minorities. Originally from the Pacific Northwest (with family from the Southeastern US and Europe), she graduated from Cornish College of the Arts in 2007 and dedicated herself to art and activism after becoming disabled in 2014.

Rachel works in a number of different visual mediums including watercolor paintings, paper arts, and pen-and-ink comic art. Her series *The Adventures of FibroShark* is an ongoing webcomic (available on [Patreon.com/setzerstudioarts](https://patreon.com/setzerstudioarts)) focused on the lived experiences of people who have become disabled by capitalist burn-out, as well as boosting the voices of those whose lived experiences are not valued in our current cultural climate. Meanwhile, the painting series *Arborist* (watercolor paintings of trees on handmade recycled paper) focused on a more general belief that anything can be redeemed and made beautiful with time and sincere effort. In time, she hopes to make the art world more accessible to disabled people by promoting understanding, representation, and cross-media cooperation.

Rachel lives in Seattle with her partner, Peter, and their dog, (her service dog), Bocephus. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, hot baths, and subverting the dominant paradigm.



KAMALI DEREK SENIOR

Kamali Derek Senior is 30 years old bi-polar Veteran who has served in Operation Enduring Freedom. He has lived in Seattle for 5 years, and is the Organizing Director for a community organization named Seattle Against Foreclosure and Eviction.

ABOUT THE PANELISTS



KAMEKO THOMAS

As a Writer and Disabled Black Woman Veteran, **Kameko Thomas** understands the unique relationship between storytelling and healing, better than most.

Kameko believes that hiding the truth of one's mental health journey, in a misguided attempt to shield others from its impact actually causes more harm – not only to the person dealing with the mental health concern, but to those around them, as well.

To date, Ms. Thomas has provided storytelling experiences for “Medicine and Melanin: Disability Justice Storytelling,” hosted a “Tiny Talk” on PTSD at The Union Seattle, and served as a guest lecturer at UW Medicine. Recently, Kameko’s essay on life as a Black Woman with PTSD – “The Ostrich” – took 3rd place in VA Puget Sound’s creative arts competition.

Kameko holds a B.A. in English from Wiley College. She also holds an M.A. in English and Creative Writing from Southern New Hampshire University, where she was inducted into Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society.

On the web: www.vonemcreative.com

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LINDA CHASTINE

Linda Chastine is a Black Queer Femme living, working, and building community in Seattle, WA.

Graduating from Clark Atlanta University’s Whitney M. Young Jr., School of Social Work in 2015, Linda has been dedicated to health equity for marginalized communities. As the daughter to a mother living with chronic illness and as a thriver, who has lived with multiple “invisible” disabilities herself, Linda is acquainted with the struggle for equitable access, care, and resources that often hinders differently-abled persons ability to thrive; especially those living with chronic illness or disability who carry other marginalized identities.

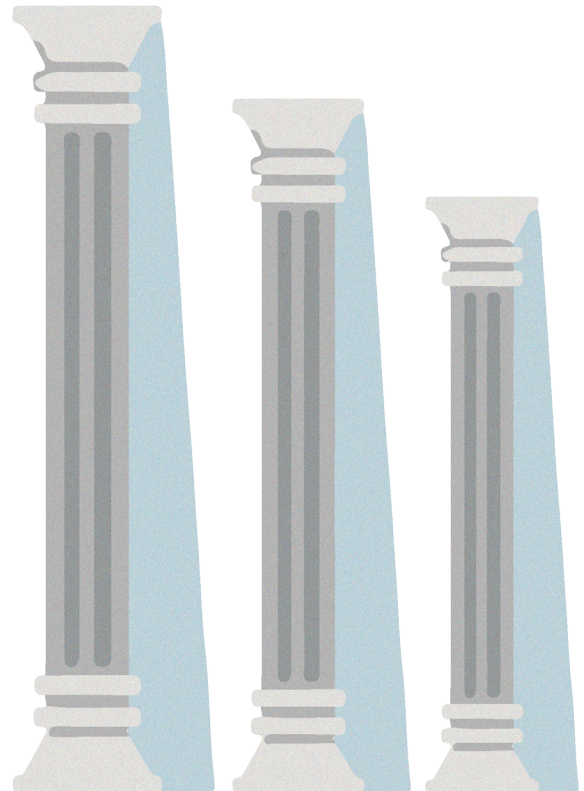
Linda is the current HIV Program Coordinator with African Americans Reach and Teach Health Ministry (AARTH), is an associate facilitator with The Krista Foundation Global Citizenship, and is a community organizer- specifically with the QTBIPOC collective, Queer the Land.

Linda is passionate about cultivating and facilitating spaces for Black, Brown, & Indigenous Queer People of Color (BIQPOC), to safely share their narratives as a joyful proclamation of defiance, resiliency, reclamation, and reparation. Ultimately, Linda is dedicated to dismantling all forms of oppression so that one day, all life may have the ability to live in fullness with love, joy, & dignity, free from fear, shame, and injustice.

CONTINUE LEARNING

September 24, 2019

- 1) Panelists' Personal Stories – Lived Experiences
- 2) Nursesey Rhyme Self Reflections



STRONG AFRO AMERICAN WOMEN:

The Intersection between Blackness and Emotional Intelligence

By Christy Abram

Anxiety is commonly seen as a mental/emotional disorder that causes an individual to withdrawal and act irrationally. The words often used to define anxieties are trepidation, perturbation, or a general unease in the mind and body.

What people can't fathom is the loneliness and invisibility that accompanies anxiety. Those who struggle with anxiety often feel unseen or heard. Many of us are "faking it to make it." Externally we seem together, but internally we are fighting to exist.

Our thoughts hold us prisoner. Furthermore, the physical manifestation of uneasiness causes our bodies to react unfavorably. Our palms sweat, we develop ticks, panic, persevere, and dread contact with others.

The perception of being seen is terrifying. We straighten our shirts and squirm in our skirts, hoping they can't hear ruminating thoughts or catch us checking our heartrate on our IWatch for the eighteenth time.

"Oh my God, what if I die?" we think.

"What if something happens? Where is the closest exit?"

Anxiety makes you feel unsafe and bewildered. It causes you to feel fragmented until the sensible parts of who you are become unrecognizable.

While working at a healthcare organization, I became overloaded with stress, so I took advantage of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). I was assigned a therapist close to my home, which was North Carolina at the time. The therapist, Ann, was a small Jewish lady with a particular smile. She wore pastel slacks with

"What if something happens? Where is the closest exit?"

an oversized brown blazer, and meticulously brushed sandy brown hair.

Ann welcomed me into her office. I sat while she gathered her notepad and admired the family photos that adorned her desk. "How are you, Christy?" She asked. "What brings you in today?"

I released a bountiful sigh and relentlessly spewed the stressors that had plagued me for months. I shared a dissatisfaction with work, particularly my co-workers, and my anxiety about not feeling fulfilled in life.

She listened—nodding at my words and only interjecting when warranted. After talking for a while, she interrupted. "Stand up," she ordered. Confused, I crept to my feet towering over her five-foot frame.

"Look at you," she announced, draping her tiny hands on my shoulders. "You are a strong Afro American woman. You worry too much. Besides, if all else fails, you have affirmative action." Ann gave a nod then took a seat. I lingered above her, distracted by her commentary.

Affirmative action, I thought. Nothing Ann offered made sense. In those moments, I didn't feel strong, anxiety had hijacked my body progressively creating a hollow shell, and all she could see was a "Strong Afro American woman?"

continued

Incensed, I gathered my things and left Ann's office. Unfortunately, since the encounter with Ann, I have experienced many adverse interactions at work. I've been referred to as angry and too black acting. I've been told to calm down and minimized when speaking my truth. Neither of the offenders could understand how the distinction between my blackness and professionalism had caused a rift in my mental illness. I struggled to remain sane, while in their feeble mind, all they could see was a strong Afro American woman.

Over the years, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become the cornerstone of my professional and personal development. I believe if organizations and individuals increase their EI, the likelihood of them marginalizing others will greatly decrease. **In my situation, I believe there are four things the individuals could've done differently:**

- Practice Compassionate Communication
- Check their Bias
- Practice Self-awareness
- Adapt an Equity Mindset

I once heard, "Everyone, in some way, experiences a mental illness in their lifetime." If individuals learn the impact of their words, thoughts, and actions, issues around race and bias will inevitably dissipate. Self-care encompasses all aspects of who we are. Learning to acknowledge the wounds in our bodies give us the compassion to see the tenderness in others.

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"Everyone, in some way, experiences a mental illness in their lifetime"

STORY OF EXPERIENCE, LIVED OR SECONDARY, OF INTERSECTIONAL/ INVISIBLE DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

By Kameko Thomas

My experience of invisible disability is rooted in what could be described as “Benevolent Ableism.” “Benevolent Ableism” occurs once people find out you have *any* kind of disability, to be honest, but it occurs most often with disabled folks who don’t have “tells” in which people can more easily respond.

The absolute worst thing about dealing with BA is that the truth of my experience as a Black Woman living at the intersections of race, gender, *and* disability, is either questioned or completely dismissed.

I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve been told “But you don’t look disabled,” as if: (1) Telling someone that is a compliment of some sort, and; (2) Disability is supposed to have a “look” to it that makes it easily recognizable for others. In addition to being reductive, the assumption is harmful and insulting, because my narrative then becomes one of “in spite of” (or sometimes “because of”), instead of just taking the sum total of my work and contributions for what they are, and appreciating the value they bring.

Even when people don’t say out loud that I don’t “look” disabled, their treatment of me is based on the expectations they have of my abilities as a disabled person. The problem with this, unfortunately, is that since people can only see the part of the glacier that’s *above* the surface, they often ask me for *far* more than what they should, because functionality is the Language of Productivity.

In other words, if I can do anything at all, especially if I can do it well, then there is – according to most – a mismatch between what I say, and what I do.

What most never see, however, is the price I pay, every time I bring my time, my tools, and my talents to the table.

I’ve had more than a few experiences with that, in 2019, alone. No matter how many times I’ve said that my insomnia (a byproduct of my PTSD) interferes with my sleep, and makes morning meetings a less than ideal situation, when I show up late (which is often), folks get mad, because they had to wait. Never mind the number of times I’ve said my disability warrants an accommodation of “no morning meetings,” and never mind the fact I’ve said exactly why morning meetings don’t work for me; because I do GREAT work that always leaves my clients and partners satisfied, my requests fall on deaf ears. To many, “Disabled” doesn’t mean “differently abled.” To many, “Disabled” means you can’t do anything, at all, let alone do it *well*.

In many ways, I am a “victim” of my own stubbornness and ambition: Because Post-traumatic Stress Disorder has taken so much from me, I often work myself to a point of exhaustion, just to prove a point, and that takes a toll.

Recently, I conceived and produced an inaugural event honoring the unique contributions and sacrifices made by our nation’s Black Veterans. The event went very well, and everyone who attended was impressed with the programming, as well as the turnout. Even if I say so, myself, I think I did an excellent job, and I was extremely proud to see the results of my hard work.

The problem? ME. Because of my high-functionality, people don’t realize that their 100 mph is MY 50 mph, and that I only seem prolific because I make the most of the energy at my disposal. The Veterans’ event wore me out, because when the smoked cleared, I was the only person doing most of the heavy lifting – lifting I did, because, again, I “looked” like I could handle it.

continued

When I burnout, I spend days, if not sometimes weeks, in bed, recovering. That's not the part people *don't* see; it's the part they **choose not** to see, because it doesn't fit into their Narrative of Functionality. Because of this Narrative, I often end up doing more work, because it "looks" like I can do it all. But perception and reality can sometimes be *miles* apart, even when they're in the same room. And I pay a much higher price, for this perceived functional ideal.

Even when people don't say out loud that I don't "look" disabled, their treatment of me is based on the expectations they have of my abilities as a disabled person.

What could have been done in the situation to have improved the outcome, impact, or approach:

- Offer to provide more help; don't assume that because I CAN do everything, that it means I SHOULD
- Listen to me when I say I can't do morning meetings, OR check the attitude and the frustration when I show up late for a morning meeting, after I already made you aware of the likelihood
- Educate themselves on the specifics of my disability, so they could temper their expectations
- Improve EQ so that they would have known to step up, when I was obviously running out of gas

What you feel organizations, employers, peers, and reports can do to increase equity for folks with intersectional/ invisible disabilities:

- Educate themselves on the specifics of a person's disability, so they'll know when to step up, and when to pull back
- (For independent contractors) Build accommodations into each contract that allows you to take care of your mental health needs, without sacrificing the project or the quality of the work
- Don't take a disabled person's bad days personally; my mental health has absolutely nothing to do with anyone else, and should be viewed from that lens
- **DO NOT USE MINIMIZING LANGUAGE OUT OF FRUSTRATION** (ex. Don't call a PTSD sufferer "crazy" because you're frustrated with them, or because they refuse to prioritize YOUR needs over theirs.)
- If you can't or won't help; leave them be. Silence is better than cruelty, no matter how well-intentioned

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MY STORY

By Linda Chastine

It was my introduction to the health sphere, as a volunteer employee, at a long standing, reputable, small nonprofit- here in Seattle, that I experienced racialized ableism, in a context where I could verbally express it. In reflection, I had experienced racialized ableism throughout my life- especially in the context of education and medical care, but this experience was pungent. I began my service year at a health advocacy and education organization, with another volunteer employee. My counterpart was a type A personality, “go getter”, quick on her feet to get tasks completed; she had great memory, and never missed an opportunity to speak or share her opinion-whether someone asked for it or not. She was what some refer to as, a high achiever. My counter part was a white woman, from the Midwest- her cultural context was that production determined value, success, achievement. And so, she produced a lot. She got things done.

I am the opposite of my former colleague; completing grade school with untreated depression and undiagnosed anxiety and Attention Deficit Disorder, producing work has always been a challenge for me. I never received any specialized learning plan throughout grade school- and was often left to teach myself, due to my need for extra time and attention. Attention Deficit Disorder shows up in my professional performance as trouble judging time and space, barriers around written work, difficulty with details and creating functional processes. It can look like a lack of organization, physical and mental clutter, memory deficiency, and social anxiety- to name a few aspects. Since this position was one of my first in the “professional” arena, I was likely still learning the ropes- and at a pace not aligned with my white female colleague.

Half of the year had passed when my former colleague got a job in Washington D.C. and left the program, leaving me to be the sole volunteer at

the organization. When she left, my experience was turned on its head. For the first six months, due to trauma and survival, I had not realized how much my white female supervisor had neglected my growth and interest. I had been conditioned throughout my life, through my experiences with white female authority figures- most of my educators growing up were white women, to not ask for help, to not demand what I need, to not speak up for myself, to not be offended when I was last on the list. But as the sole volunteer it was, verbally and non-verbally, expected of me to take on additional work. I was set up to fail because I did not perform in the way my former colleague did. I did not produce at her speed; I wasn’t running around the office to ask if anyone needed me to do any work for them. I was finding it difficult to just keep up with my own workload. Everything took me twice as long to complete and then I would have a lot of small errors—because of my struggle with details. Instead of receiving help from my supervisor, my effort was over looked or criticized, I was told that I didn’t want this opportunity enough, I was looked down upon, I was almost fired from a volunteer program- which asked me to do the work of a full time employee for only \$850 a month, in Seattle- one of the most expensive places to live in the world. In this conflict, I was forced to disclose my multiple disabilities and made to qualify and quantify them. The journey to resolution was a long and arduous one, where I still felt like I was being compared to a middle class, white, straight, cis woman and was asked to perform in a way that did not align with my needs or experiences. I became the work horse, or mammy of the office; a trope long overused. Being expected to work for little pay, in a toxic environment, as the only Black woman (to ever be employed there—even to this day), at the lowest position in the institution.

continued

What could have been done differently:

- A detailed and multi layered approach to the work distribution, one that included the collaboration and input of the whole team. It's important to discuss how much work an employee can take on and the employee should be in the process of crafting how that looks.
- Regular check ins that offer support, solution, and collaboration. Someone who experiences time, detail, and organizational challenges could benefit from having someone to check in with. Leadership should not micromanage but should be available and proactive in facilitating the process of the completion of projects.
- Leadership asking what my needs were and working collaboratively, to adjust as needed.
- An openness from the team to be invested in different methods of skill building, to fit my learning style.
- A facilitated dialogue and continued training for staff around racialized ableism, implicit bias, & micro aggressions in the workplace.

Ways organizations act differently:

- Have employees be a part of deciding deadlines. If a quick turn around cannot be avoided, disperse the workload equitably; emphasizing teamwork and collaboration, instead of an atmosphere of competition and individuality.
- Create a brave and safe space for employees to share their disabilities with management. Disability rights needs to be a regular part of staff communication & continued education, which should be done to destigmatize disability, create an environment of support among leadership and supporting staff, and to end the practice of discrimination based on disability.
- Eliminate policy that is overarching and is not predicated on a case by case basis. Each employee is different, and each situation holds nuance- that standard policy does not account for. Organizations should emphasize building relationships with employees, built on mutual trust, and provide employees with the space to share their narrative.
- Provide support for employees by having a fully staffed team-where everyone is utilizing their experiences.
- One on one mentorship programs.



EXPERIENCES WITH INTERSECTING ABLEIST OPPRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE

By Rachel Setzer

Workplace accommodations and “dress code violations”. The majority of this example deals with the intersection of ableism and classism, but other intersections have been noted.

During my first two years in college, I worked at a retail card and gift shop downtown where I made barely enough money to pay my rent. The floors were concrete and we were expected to stand all day (even though I had very bad lower back pain, for which I was taking up to a gram of ibuprofen at a time; at age 19), and so I wore my only pair of comfortable shoes during my 6 or 8 hour weekend shifts. After a certain point the (middle-aged, able-bodied, white, cisgender, female) manager noticed my shoes had thick soles and were bright pink and became irrationally over-concerned about how I was unprofessional for violating the dress code (even though customers could not see and definitely did not care about my shoes). I shared with her my history of back pain and that I have a pain condition that standing on concrete for 6-8 hours aggravated, especially if I wore other shoes (it should be noted that I wore these same shoes nearly every day at school for this same reason). Her response was that she cared more about the dress code than the health of her employees, and then she accused me of lying because I was “too young for back pain” (blatant ableism and ageism; I also expect that if I had been a thin, white, 19-year-old man she wouldn’t have said this to me).

Over the course of my employment at this shop, I attempted to change my footwear to meet the dress code, but the only shoes I owned that accommodated me and didn’t add to my pain were the pink ones. When I had gone back to the pink ones the day after my black shoes had made my pain worse, the manager once

again denied my disability and threatened to fire me, but never followed through. At one point, she attempted to humiliate me in front of the entire store over it. This resulted in me being forced to disclose to everyone I worked with that I wore these particular shoes to protect myself from pain, because I have a chronic pain condition (which everyone but the manager believed since they worked with me directly). On another occasion, she offered me a mere \$20 to buy new shoes that fit within the dress code, despite the fact that even in 2004-money this was nowhere near covering the cost of new shoes sturdy enough to not actively aggravate my back problems. When I told her that wouldn’t be enough she again stated how little she cared and said “just wear black shoes.” At that point she had denied my disability frequently enough that I didn’t even bring it up anymore. While I worked for her, this manager’s harassment over and active disbelief in my disability made it harder and harder for me to remain at a job where I had done nothing wrong other than being inconveniently poor, non-white, and in pain. When I found a better job, I quit unceremoniously.

At that point she had denied my disability frequently enough that I didn’t even bring it up anymore.

Ironically, at the job I left the card shop for, (an upscale real estate office), I wore the same bright pink thick soled shoes almost every weekend and no one there ever thought it was “unprofessional”.

continued

Here's what she could have done differently:

- Prioritized labor over some words in a manual. Dress codes can be important to set a tone for a workplace, but they are not set in stone. Refusing to allow a slight deviation to the dress code for a known medical issue is refusal of a reasonable accommodation and a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- If you have a worker with back problems (or any disability), offer some kind of accommodations that will help alleviate some of the tension of standing all day. DO NOT accuse them of making up pain (or lying about any disability) because they're "lazy"; if you are tempted to make an accusation like this, examine your biases and ask if you would say the same thing about a middle-aged white person of the same gender as you; or if you would say it to someone you care about.
- Include in your employee handbook information about "reasonable accommodations" and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Don't embarrass your workers in front of their peers. That makes them want to do a worse job, not a better one.
- Don't force your workers to disclose their medical issues to each other as a substitute for making reasonable accommodations.

Increasing equity for employees with intersectional and invisible disabilities:

- Debunk the laziness myth in your workplace environment, especially as applied to marginalized groups. Declaring a person "lazy" for not meeting specific expectations is often used as a weapon against marginalized people in the workforce, and it is usually an excuse to avoid making policy changes that would help everyone.
- Pay your employees a living wage.
- Never accuse a person with a disability of lying about it. That is unprofessional.
- So-called "dress code violations" are an easy way to enforce bias and discriminate against people in the workplace. Instead of having a detailed list of allowed-and-disallowed clothing, encourage professionalism by modeling it and allowing your employees to exercise judgment in what is and is not professional attire for your workplace.



NURSERY RHYME SELF-REFLECTIONS

When I was a child, my grandmom used the templates of nursery rhymes to teach me life lessons. Below, her top three favorite stories have been adapted for this workshop to help you reflect on where you are in terms of allyship for disabled people/ with disabilities, and where to go next on your journey.

Choose one prompt each week, and write your reflection on the next page of Notes, or in a journal.

Goldilocks and Three Bears:

- Think of the last time you entered into a community organizing or social action space where you held the privileged, status quo identity, (any from the Social Identity Worksheet).
- What was an instance where you chose the moderate route in your advocacy within that space? How did or could harm arise from your actions?
- How could restorative justice and/ or cultural humility address the harm?

The Three Little Pigs:

- When has your allyship been based on a weak foundation or construction that collapsed?
- When was a time your social equity journey has been built on a strong foundation or construction that withstood adversity or attack?
- Who is the wolf trying to destroy your foundation/ What silences, suppresses, or oppresses your attempts at advocacy?
- What is needed to fortify and reinforce your foundation or construction against the wolf?

Little Red Riding Hood:

- What is your personal cultural humility mission and how does it inform your journey through the “woods of inequity?”
- Who or What is the Wolf: What is your biggest barrier in your social equity journey?
- In what ways does the Wolf disguise itself and cause a backslide or dissonance in your social equity work?
- What are three ways you will remain hypervigilant against the tricks of the Wolf, or dismantle the Wolf’s plan/ status quo?

“Cultural humility is the lifelong commitment to increasing awareness of self and our impacts on others through a praxis, (or cycle of practice) of four pillars:

1. Lifelong self evaluation and critique,
2. Lifelong learning and growth,
3. Evaluation of “power-over” dynamics, and elimination of those that are oppressive or marginalizing, and amplification and allyship to those most affected by inequity or injustice, and
4. Continually working to dismantle oppressive and harmful systems and dynamics.”

*“When it comes to intersectional disability justice, especially for folks with invisible disabilities, **cultural humility is the foundation** to create an equitable and inclusive workplace from the core outward.*

“Many people with disabilities feel they can take care of themselves—it’s others’ behavior and attitudes, or the workplace environment or systems, that become a barrier. This dynamic of “the social model of disability” is one of the main foundations for creating an equitable and inclusive workplace for people with invisible and intersectional disabilities.”

—ChrisTiana Obeyesumner, Presenter of this Session

PLATINUM



GOLD

NORDSTROM

SILVER



BRONZE



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