

Being disabled in academia:
Perspectives on ableism,
disclosure and inclusivity



Halli 

@iamharaldur · [Follow](#)



Dear @elonmusk 🙌

9 days ago the access to my work computer was cut, along with about 200 other Twitter employees.

However your head of HR is not able to confirm if I am an employee or not. You've not answered my emails.

Maybe if enough people retweet you'll answer me here?

3:38 PM · Mar 6, 2023



[Read the full conversation on Twitter](#)



138.9K



Reply



Copy link

[Read 2.4K replies](#)



Halli ✓ · Mar 6, 2023

@iamharaldur · [Follow](#)

Dear @elonmusk 🙏

9 days ago the access to my work computer was cut, along with about 200 other Twitter employees.

However your head of HR is not able to confirm if I am an employee or not. You've not answered my emails.

Maybe if enough people retweet you'll answer me here?



Elon Musk ✓

@elonmusk · [Follow](#)

What work have you been doing?

7:41 PM · Mar 6, 2023



73.2K



Reply



Copy link

[Read 4.4K replies](#)



Halli  · Mar 6, 2023

@iamharaldur · [Follow](#)

Replying to @elonmusk
Figma.

All active design projects.



Elon Musk 

@elonmusk · [Follow](#)



8:27 PM · Mar 6, 2023



7.9K



Reply



Copy link

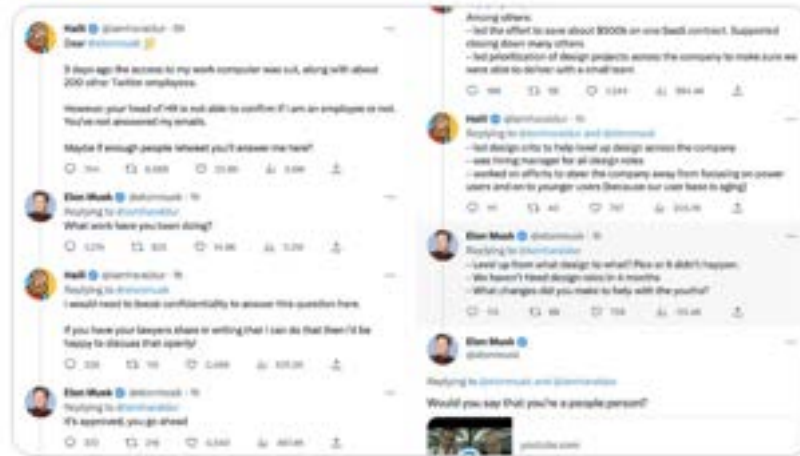
[Read 1.4K replies](#)



Alex Cohen · Mar 6, 2023

@anothercohen · Follow

I'm not going to lie, this is the most entertaining exit interview I've ever witnessed



Elon Musk

@elonmusk · Follow

The reality is that this guy (who is independently wealthy) did no actual work, claimed as his excuse that he had a disability that prevented him from typing, yet was simultaneously tweeting up a storm.

Can't say I have a lot of respect for that.

2:47 AM · Mar 7, 2023



112.1K



Reply



Copy link

Read 8.6K replies



Halli

@iamharaldur · Follow



Hi again @elonmusk 🙌

I hope you are well.

I'm fine too. I'm thankful for your interest in my health.

But since you mentioned it, I wanted to give you more info.

I have muscular dystrophy. It has many effects on my body.

Let me tell you what they are:



Elon Musk

@elonmusk

Replying to @anothercohen

The reality is that this guy (who is independently wealthy) did no actual work, claimed as his excuse that he had a disability that prevented him from typing, yet was simultaneously tweeting up a storm.

Can't say I have a lot of respect for that.

7:30 AM · Mar 7, 2023



[Read the full conversation on Twitter](#)



339.1K



Reply



Copy link

[Read 3.5K replies](#)



eve6 
@Eve6 · [Follow](#)



Elon deleted this tweet likely per suggestion from his lawyers but there's this thing about the internet



Shibetoshi Nakamoto  @BillyM2k · 15m

i don't think it's a good idea to shit on former employees in public

 141

 48

 977

 169.6K



Elon Musk 
@elonmusk

Replying to @BillyM2k

He's the worst, sorry.

5:47 PM · Mar 7, 2023 · 160.6K Views

12:34 PM · Mar 7, 2023



 26.9K

 Reply

 Copy link

[Read 202 replies](#)



Elon Musk  · Mar 7, 2023



@elonmusk · [Follow](#)

Replying to @danielhoughton @anothercohen and @iamharaldur

Based on your comment, I just did a videocall with Halli to figure out what's real vs what I was told. It's a long story.

Better to talk to people than communicate via tweet.



Elon Musk 

@elonmusk · [Follow](#)

I would like to apologize to Halli for my misunderstanding of his situation. It was based on things I was told that were untrue or, in some cases, true, but not meaningful.

He is considering remaining at Twitter.

6:51 PM · Mar 7, 2023



19.3K



Reply



Copy link

[Read 6.1K replies](#)

Our only rule today, and forever –

It is OK to talk about disability!

It should be the norm not the exception

Take a minute to reflect

- What does the word *disability* mean to you?
- What personal experience do you have with disability, either with your own lived experience, within your family, or in your community?

Up to **1 in 4** adults in the United States
(26%) have some type of disability



Definitions of disability

- There are many definitions of disability used today:
 - Disability is part of being human. Almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life. An estimated 1.3 billion people – about 16% of the global population – currently experience significant disability.
 - Disability as a social construct. Rather than one universal experience of disability, disabled people have different experiences across time and cultures, and ideas about what disability means and who is disabled are defined by humans.
 - Distilled that disabled people are treated as more disabled by society than by our actual disability.
 - Persons with disabilities have physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

DO

Person with a disability; persons with disabilities, children with disabilities

Uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user

Deaf, partially deaf, hard of hearing

Person with a physical disability

Nonverbal, nonspeaking

Person with an intellectual, developmental, or cognitive disability, neurodiverse

DON'T

Outdated terms: Handicapped, crippled, etc.

Jargon: Physically challenged; differently abled

Negative, disempowering words: victim, sufferer

Confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair bound

Lame, crippled

Mute, dumb

Mentally defective, mentally challenged, retarded

Etiquette

- Don't touch personal equipment
- Don't victimize
- Don't assume
- Adjust posture to eye-level by sitting or standing at eye-level
- Make eye contact
- Ask before providing assistance
- Don't underestimate abilities
- Speak to the person before his/her caregiver
- Seek to understand the person and their disability before expecting to be understood

People with disabilities are people first, but they happen to have a disability.

My disability is part of my identity and my life, but I do not allow it to define me or restrict my activities, growth or life.

I would not change my disability as I would be changing who I am.

Disability rights

Historical context

- Historically, people with disabilities have been regarded as individuals to be pitied, feared or ignored. They have been portrayed as helpless victims, repulsive adversaries, heroic individuals overcoming tragedy, and charity cases who must depend on others for their well being and care. Media coverage frequently focused on heartwarming features and inspirational stories that reinforced stereotypes, patronized and underestimated individuals' capabilities.
- **Achieving equal and civil rights for people with disability is only fairly recent.**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)

- Section 504 was added in 1977.
- Forbids organizations and employers from excluding or denying individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services. It defines the rights of individuals with disabilities to participate in, and have access to, program benefits and services.
- It applies to all organizations and employers that receive federal funds.
- Defines a person with a disability as any person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment.
- Defines a reasonable accommodation as a change, adaptation, or modification to a policy, program, service or workplace which will allow a qualified person with a disability to participate fully in a program, take advantage of a service, or perform a job.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

- Signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President George H.W. Bush.
- It extends the civil rights protections of Section 504 to all organizations and employers.
- General rule of the ADA
 - "No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity."

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

- The term "qualified individual with a disability" means an individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable modification to rules, policies, or practices, the removal of architectural, communication, or transportation barriers, or the provision of auxiliary aids and services, meets the essential eligibility requirements for the receipt of services or the participation in programs or activities provided by a public entity."
- Disability defined as in Section 504
- Reasonable accommodations defined as in Section 504

ADA Amendments Act of 2008

- History – Many lawsuits followed enactment of ADA, especially related to employment. Courts focused on whether the individual with a disability met the definition of disability under the ADA.
- Courts never addressed the acts of discrimination.
- What Amendments Act of 2008 did was to reinforce for the courts that the ADA is **civil rights legislation** and should, therefore, be interpreted as broadly as possible.
- ADAAA did not change any of the definitions nor did it change accommodations.

Ableism

Ableism

- Ableism is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior.
- Manifested by insults, assumption that those with disability cannot manage their own lives, separation into smaller groups, referring to persons with disabilities as heroes and victims, “inspirational porn”, etc.
- Many institutions are ableist, and academia can be viewed as one of them.
- Ableism shares roots with other oppressions, like racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia.

Ableist hallmarks

- **Deny** – If the problem does not exist, it's not necessary to fix it.
- **Delay** – Take as long as possible to resolve problem. With any luck, the complainant will graduate or otherwise go away. The clock can be reset with the next complainant.
- **Insult** – Insult complainant or persons with a disability in general. This can include humiliation, outright discrimination, etc. Tell the complainant that he or she is the only one that has the problem. Exaggerate costs of resolution. Make it clear that almost anybody else is an expert and that the person with a disability is inferior.
- **Exclude** – Exclude the individual from participating in the resolution or from any other participation.

Overcoming Ableism

- **Accommodate** – Make whatever changes are necessary for the individual with a disability to fully participate. Provide tools and resources, remove barriers, etc.
- **Include** – Include the individual with a disability in participating in the resolution of the problem and in all other forms of participation.
- **Respect** – Respect the individual with a disability as a person, for his or her knowledge, competence, understanding, and capabilities.
- **Educate** – Educate yourself and others regarding the value and expectations of all individuals, including those with disabilities. Educate yourself and others regarding civil rights and social justice for all populations.

Disclosure

Not all disabilities are visible (not exhaustive)

Visible

- People who are paralyzed and need some type of supports to move around
- Severe developmental disability A physical difference
- Missing arms or legs

Non-visible

- People with hearing loss
- Speech impediments may or may not be noticed right away
- People who are blind can look to be sighted if you do not notice the aid they require to move around
- Intellectual, developmental, or cognitive disability may be misinterpreted as lack of intelligence, laziness or carelessness

Disclosing disability

- Some people have no choice.
- For those that do, it is a very personal decision and should be well informed.
 - Reasons can vary on a person-to-person basis.
 - Disclosing can be challenging, reliving past experiences, bullying, feelings of exclusion, treated differently, people can question your position/performance.
- Usually done to receive accommodations.
 - Only about 30% of students at US Universities request accommodations when enrolling even if they had them in High School.
- But can help to
 - Reduce stress as no secrets anymore.
 - Be protected against discrimination.
 - Increase comfort level at work.
 - Provide positive representation

Inclusivity

Inclusion

- Starts in our communities, our schools, our workplace
 - It is about attitudes and developing an inclusive philosophy.
- Develop accessibility and inclusivity as an approach to practice:
 - Enable an “equal playing field for all”
 - Provide respect and accept that individuals are the best experts for their needs.
 - Ask your class as a whole if there are any additional needs or if they have accommodation letters to send them to you.
 - It is a University requirement that any official accommodations from the URI office of Disability, Access and Inclusion are followed.

Inclusion

- Starts in our communities, our schools, our workplace
 - It is about attitudes and developing an inclusive philosophy.
- Develop accessibility and inclusivity as an approach to practice:
 - Enable an “equal playing field for all”
 - Provide respect and accept that individuals are the best experts for their needs.
 - Ask your class if individuals have any additional needs or if they have accommodation letters to send them to you.
 - It is a University requirement that any official accommodations from the URI office of Disability, Access and Inclusion are followed.

Inclusion

Two different ways to start being inclusive:

- **Interpersonal**
 - Facing class when speaking, not covering mouth.
- **Technical**
 - Accessible course materials, exceptions to “no laptop” policies. Class recordings using the Panopto software.
- View these as beneficial to everyone:
 - Example: providing PowerPoints to entire class

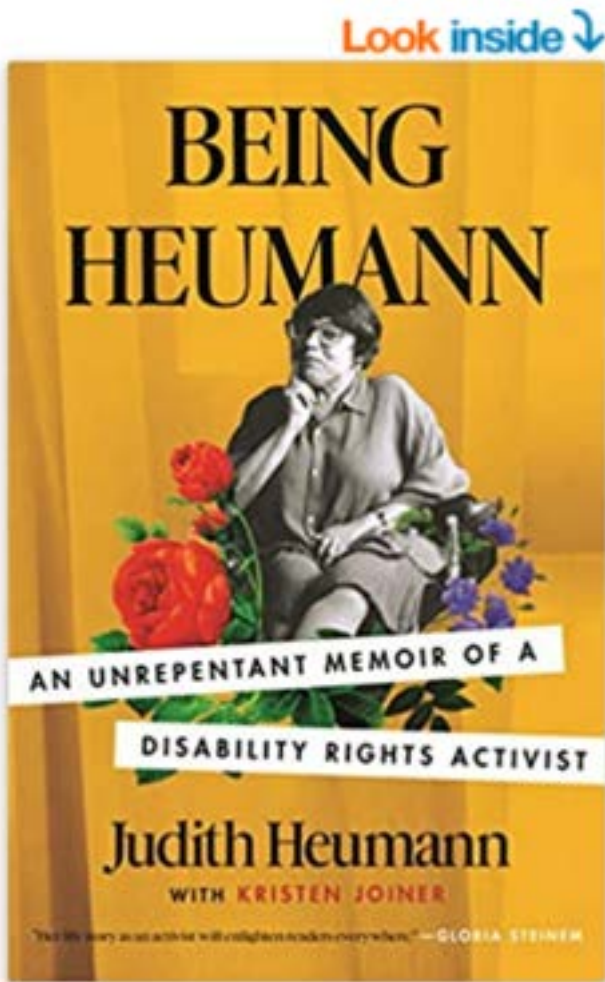
Resources

CRIP CAMP

A DISABILITY REVOLUTION



Streaming on Netflix



Being Heumann: An
Unrepentant Memoir of a
Disability Rights Activist (2021)
by Judith Heumann, Kristen
Joiner

I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much



Stella Young,
TEDxSydney

https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much?subtitle=en

- URI Disability Advocacy Group
 - <https://uridisability.weebly.com/>
- <https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/>
- <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/>
- <https://cripcamp.com/>