

INEQUALITY IS

Tiffany Yu on inequality and disability

Dismantling inequality is rooted in inclusion. Diversability's Tiffany Yu explains how exclusion is more disabling to a person than an actual disability. She believes employers should hire people with disabilities because of their strengths, not just to meet a quota.

A conversation about inequality in all its forms.

Transcript begins.

TIFFANY YU: Disability to me always felt like this elephant in the room. One of my least favorite memories growing up was this mandatory physical education class and I would always be the last kid picked, if picked is even the right word to use there. And it doesn't matter if you have a disability or not, being excluded can have a lasting impact on how we feel like we can contribute to society.

[Inequality is logo. A graphic black equal sign with an orange slash through it. #InequalityIs. Tiffany Yu, founder, Diversability. An Asian American woman with shoulder-length black hair, wearing a purple dress and silver jewelry.]

Inequality is exclusion. Exclusion is disabling, not the disability itself.

[A group of people of different ages, genders, and races with varying disabilities sit in a conference room.]

TIFFANY YU (at diversability): And how many of you guys are new to Diversability? Raise them up high and proud. Good, good. There are a billion of us who live with some sort of disability. If you don't have a disability, or you're not affected by it, you don't even really think about it, right? Disability is something I think about everyday. Like how can I make hand gestures during this talk while holding this microphone. My personal story begins about 20 years ago. My dad lost control of the car. I had broken a couple bones in my legs, so I was in a wheelchair for four months. And I stretched the nerves of my right arm so I have a bit of a funny hand. And I was trying to deal with this new identity as a person with a disability.

TIFFANY YU: It took me 13 years before I spoke publicly about the car accident and what had happened to me. And that's 13 years of shame, that I'm only now starting to explore. Part of the work that I do in the disability space is also serving as a role model for other people with disabilities to be employed. I'm a former investment banker, a techie, and now I work at a shared housing company, Common.

TIFFANY YU (at shared housing company common): I'm going to show you Havermeyer, it's a really nice space.

TIFFANY YU: And so when I think about employment with regard to disability, I think that a lot of times the way employers see hiring people with disabilities as a social good or as something they have to do to meet some sort of quota.

TIFFANY YU (at shared housing company common): So the final stop on the tour is the lounge.

TIFFANY YU: But my hope and my vision is that you see me as what I can add value to my team and not for, you know, the fact that I can't use one of my arms. Dismantling inequality, I think it's really rooted in inclusion. If we come back to grounding ourselves in our humanity, we'll remember that we're all the same and we should be equal.

[Inequality Is Logo. Join the conversation. #InequalityIs.]

End of transcript.