CENTERING A DISABILITY JUSTICE LENS IN THE WORKPLACE

uprooting ableism & supporting our Disabled and neurodivergent colleagues

- Framework Grounding
- **_Break_**
- Ableism: Deep Dive
- Q+A

*with some opportunities for interaction

ACCESS IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Artie Carden

STEFANIE LYN KAUFMAN-MTHIMKHULU

- **Pronouns:** they/she
- **Full-time Gig:** Director of Project LETS
- **About Me:** Queer, Disabled, non-binary, organizer, educator, parent, somatic and ancestral healer, TJ/CA facilitator, psych survivor
- **Lived experience with:** Disability, madness, neurodivergence, C-PTSD, autistic, sexual & interpersonal violence, suicide attempts, suicide loss, psychiatric incarceration, self-injury, chronic pain, altered states, medical abuse

BASELINE VALUES

- Access is a **practice**
- No expertise, only **offerings**
- Ask **questions**
- Make **I statements**
- **Respect and honor** different language used to describe shared experience
- Mutual **accountability**

drop in the chat: what brings you to this workshop?

*framework
grounding*

Grounding Question

Let's think of Disability as a **mismatch between the features of a person's bodymind and the features of the environment in which they live.** How does that align with or challenge what you know/have learned about Disability?

- Groups of 2-3 for 10 minutes

- Large group check in when we return

- If you'd like to be in the quiet breakout room for individual reflection, **please put a * in front of your name now!**

MYTHS ABOUT DISABILITY

Attention seeking

Disability is temporary

Mental illness is not a Disability

Disability is fixed not fluid

Disability has to be visible

Disabled people are weak, less than

DEFINITION OF DISABILITY (ADA)

The term disability means, with respect to an individual:

(A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual;

(B) a record of such an impairment; or

(C) being regarded as having such an impairment

@HijaDe2Madre

42 U.S.C. §12102(1)

People with physical impairments, people who belong to a sensory minority, people with emotional Disabilities, people with cognitive challenges, and those with chronic/severe illness. We acknowledge all communities impacted by the medicalization of their bodies, including trans, gender variant, and intersex people, and others whose bodies and minds do not conform to our culture(s) notions of "normal" and "functional."
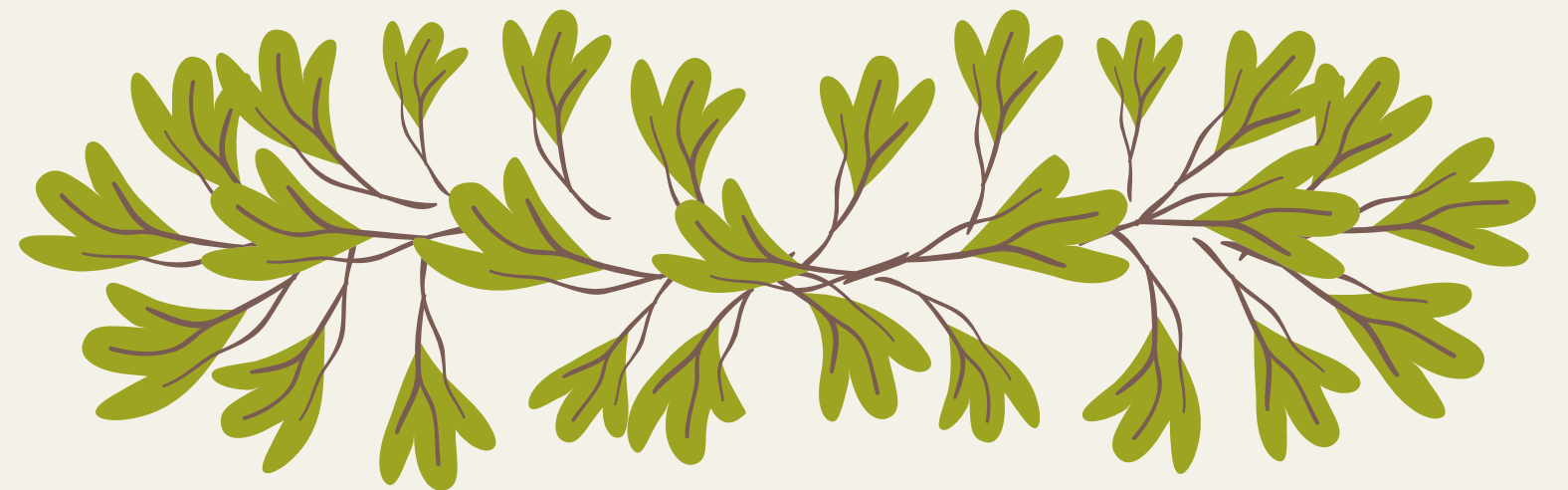
Sins Invalid

DISABILITY RIGHTS

Led by advocates working to maintain civil rights under the ADA. Focus on access, equal rights, etc.

DISABILITY JUSTICE

Led by queer, GNC, trans, Disabled people & Black, Indigenous, POC. Looks at who we consider human, unraveling oppressive systems (ableism, white supremacy, colonialism, extractive economy, & gender based oppression) while centering the bodymind.

JUDY HEUMANN

LOIS CURTIS

BRAD LOMAX

MIA MINGUS

PATTY BERNE

ELI CLARE

LEROY MOORE

TALILA LEWIS

AURORA LEVINS MORALES

STACEY MILBERN

Pathology *(Medical)*

- Views Disability from a **deficit based lens** focused on what is wrong, missing, not as good as, etc.
- Problem is located **inside of the individual**
- Focus on **teaching and adjusting individuals** to be more like non-Disabled people
- Social **skills development** centered on surviving in a neurotypical world
- **Lower expectations** and beliefs about capacity

Neurodiversity

- Coined by **Judy Singer** in the late 1990s *(an autistic sociologist, who rejected the idea that autistic people were sick & broken)*
- The term was embraced by many autistic advocates, fighting for a world where **curing people whose brains work differently is not the goal.**
- A natural part of humanity, a neutral neurotype that can be net pos/net neg at different times (EOD*)
- Inherent **individualized strengths** that must be identified and uplifted

*EOD: Expectation of Difference
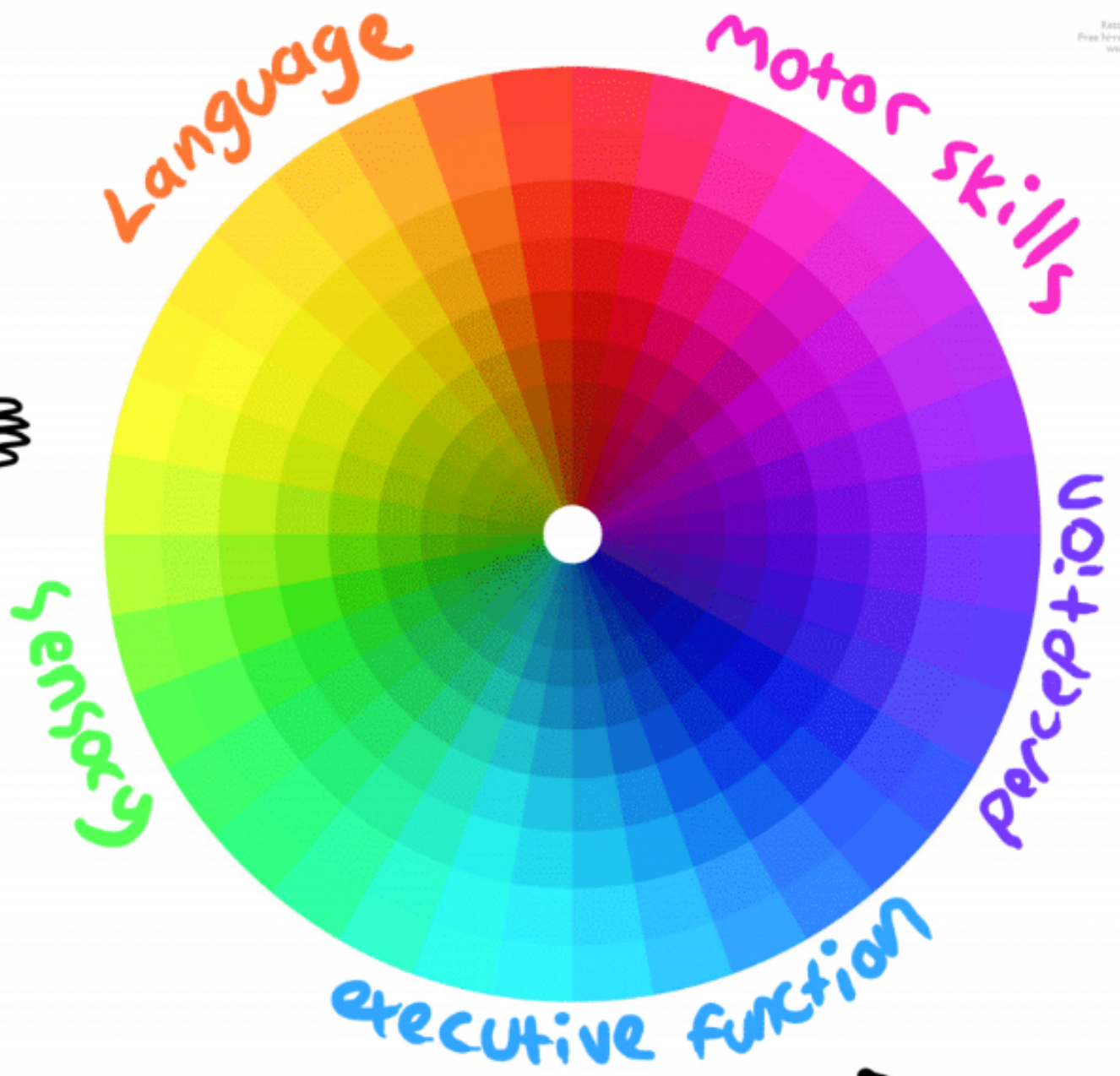
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*EOD: Expectation of Difference

identity first

autistic person

person first

person with autism

Were you taught Disabled was a bad word?

"Pippa has needs that are specific to the way her body was made. I have needs that are specific to the way my body was made. We all do."

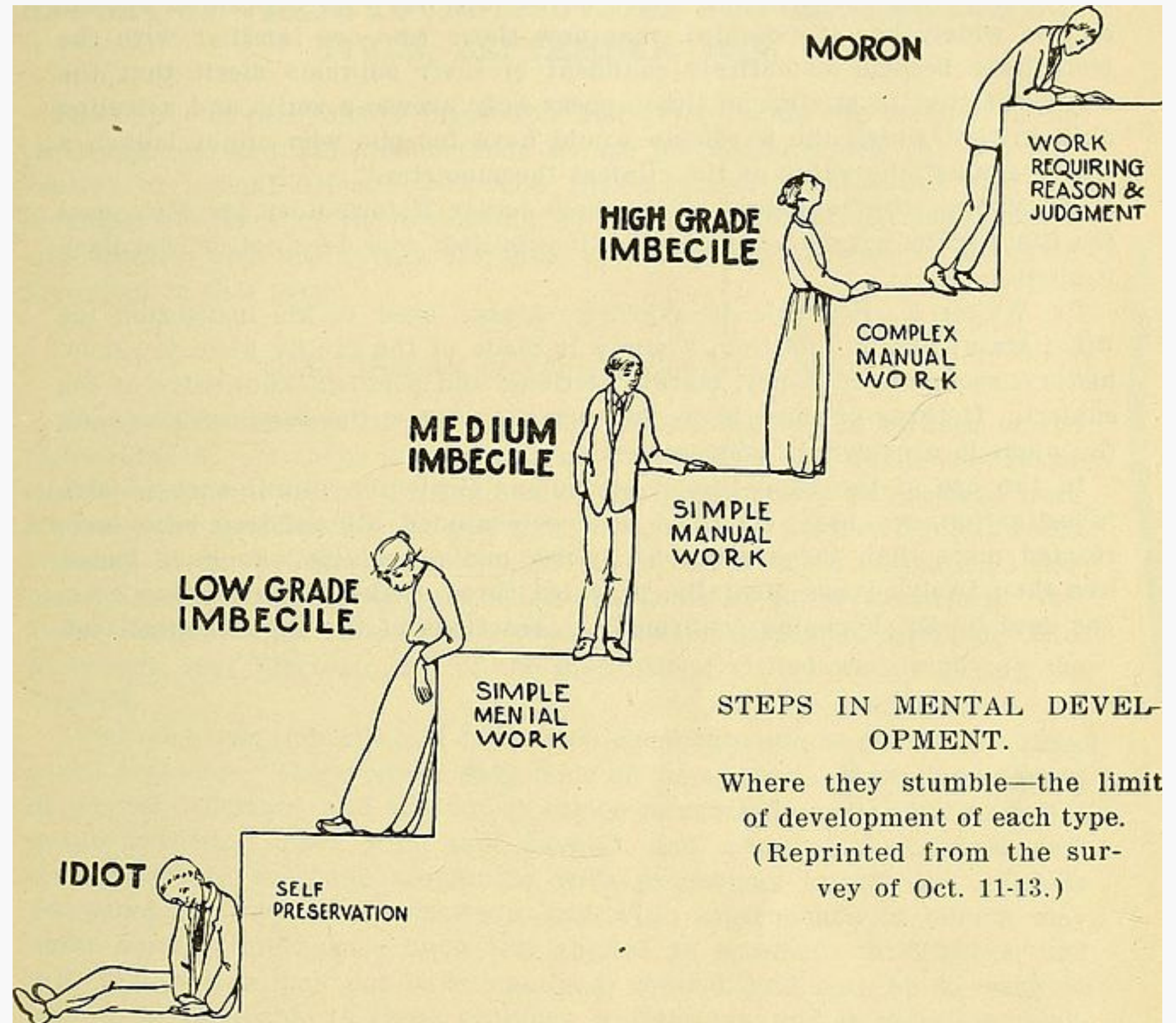Caterina Scorsone + Pippa

ableism: deep dive

ABLEISM — WORKING AND LIVING DEFINITION (BY TALILA LEWIS & OTHERS)

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

This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable or worthy based on a person's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily [re]produce, excel and "behave."

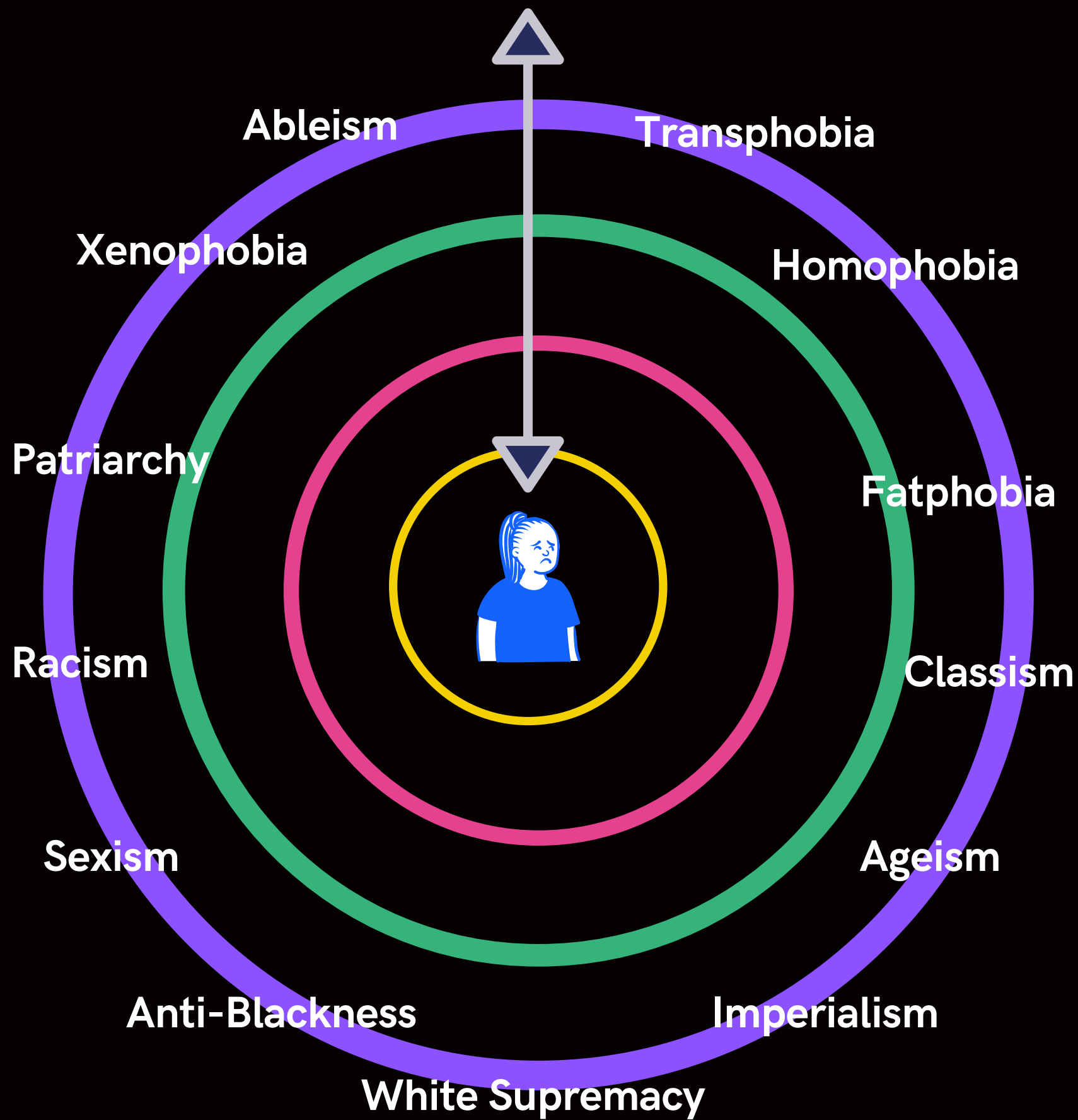You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism..

The myth that our intelligence, productivity, and appearance determine not only our worthiness, but our capacity to be seen as human is the foundation of ableism, and every system of oppression.

MORON

WORK REQUIRING REASON & JUDGMENT

HIGH GRADE IMBECILE

COMPLEX MANUAL WORK

MEDIUM IMBECILE

SIMPLE MANUAL WORK

LOW GRADE IMBECILE

SIMPLE MENIAL WORK

STEPS IN MENTAL DEVELOPMENT.

Where they stumble—the limit of development of each type. (Reprinted from the survey of Oct. 11-13.)

IDIOT

SELF PRESERVATION

EUGENICS GAVE WAY TO:

- **Queer and trans** people being institutionalized as mentally Disabled
- **Black people** being understood as less capable, smart and intelligent, therefore "naturally" fit for slave labor
- **Women's bodies** being used to produce children, when, where, and how men needed them
- **Disabled people** being seen as disposable in a capitalist and exploitative culture due to less productivity
- **Immigrants** being seen as a disease that we must "cure" because it is "weakening" our nation
- **Violence, cycles of poverty, lack of resources, and war** being used as systematic tools to construct Disability in communities and entire countries
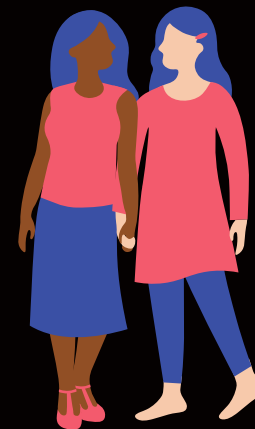
mia mingus

Design: Elliott Fukui

Ableism · Transphobia · Xenophobia · Homophobia · Patriarchy · Fatphobia · Racism · Classism · Sexism · Ageism · Anti-Blackness · Imperialism · White Supremacy

Ideological:

- Mentally ill people are dangerous
- Autism is a tragedy, burden, disease
- Disabled students can't integrate with non-Disabled students

IDEOLOGICAL

Institutional:

- Forced treatment
- "Special" education systems
- Responding to people in crisis with police
- Mandated reporting

INSTITUTIONAL

Interpersonal:

- Stigma, harassment, discrimination
- Isolation, exclusion
- Targeting, policing
- Gaslighting, disblelief

INTERPERSONAL

Internalized:

- I am a burden on my friends and family
- I am not as smart as someone without ADHD
- I will never be capable of finishing school

INTERNALIZED

HOW ABLEISM SHOWS UP WITH INTERSECTING SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

- Disability is **overrepresented in every marginalized community** *(less likely to identify with Disability, receive accurate & useful diagnostic labels, etc.)*

- **Ableism + white supremacy work together.** Disability is defined in opposition to whiteness (white = healthy, strong, stable, independent, intelligent)
    - Diagnostic criteria based on white boys & men
    - Black people are simultaneously over, under, misdiagnosed

- Who is believed? Who is met with support and understanding? Who is met with gaslighting and dismissal? **Who is seen as violent? Dangerous? Incompetent?** *

- **It can take decades to get an accurate diagnosis**
    - Access to competent healing, treatment

Access Denied

- Lack of functioning elevators, accessible bathrooms, parking spots

- Inflexible scheduling

- Assumptions of incompetence

- Being influenced by stigmatized diagnoses, and distrusting a person's emotions, experiences, reliability, and prognosis (psychosis, altered states, suicidality, PTSD, BPD)

- Lack of understanding of how neurodivergent and autistic people experience and respond to pain and sensory stimuli

- Speaking to interpreters directly instead of employees

- Weaponizing language of grit, resilience, willpower

Ableism doesn't just impact Disabled workers.

- Assumptions of laziness, bad behavior, not caring come up when employees don't "engage" or meet expectations
- Standardized hiring processes that don't offer accommodations
- Participation requirements and expectations
- Set up of offices (sitting all day)
- Needing a diagnosis (AKA something is *"wrong"* with you) to get an individualized work plan/support
- Prioritizing one (or few) means of "testing" intelligence

Disability Justice is Anti-Capitalist

- Value and worth based in production
- Use of functioning labels **(high and low)**
- How much work do we do? How quickly? How frequently? How consistently? To whose benefit and detriment?
- Be ashamed of the ways our body minds work, how we are dependent on others
- Afraid of ways we might lose capacity in the future
- Ashamed of the things that are hard of us
- **Scarcity:** limited amount of rights and justice to go around

DJ challenges the perception of value.

*"The overwhelming number of deaths, over 75%, occurred in people who had at least 4 comorbidities. So really these are people who were unwell to begin with and yes, **really encouraging news** in the context of Omicron."*

Dr. Rochelle Walensky
Director of the CDC

@artandpsychosis

WHAT HAVE WE DONE FOR NON-DISABLED FOLKS DURING COVID?

- Remote work + education
- Flexible work/school hours
- Allowing folks to see their mental health providers remotely across state lines (when previously denied by insurance)
- Remote doctors visits
- Live captions, CART, interpretation
- Recorded lectures, webinars, events
- Synchronous + asynchronous learning opportunities
- Camera on/off
- Accepting various communication styles (ex. verbal vs. typing in chat)
- Livestreaming events + conferences
- Paid sick leave
- Flexible attendance
- No documentation required to access accommodations

Toss a Carrot to Your Horse Girl
@jelenawoehr

All these tele-meetings you're having? All the people you're exchanging documents with by email instead of sitting down together? All the socializing remotely instead of nights out?

Consider offering those options all the time, disability exists even when there's no scary virus

DISABLED WORK STORIES

Sara Luterman
@slooterman

Thinking about when I got pushed out of one of my first jobs.

I asked to telecommute until my cancer treatment was over, because I knew the stress was making me tic/stim in ways that were distracting or even distressing to coworkers.

"Telecommuting is only for senior staff." twitter.com/blondehistoria...

FAILURE MODEL

EMERSON DICKMAN, JD

Regardless of the quality of teacher knowledge, the core approach to determining eligibility for special education **requires failure.** Waiting for a student with predictable vulnerabilities to emotionally decompensate or become socially marginalized before providing services is a practical and moral failure.

Stage 1: Disability

Stage 2: Disability + failure

Stage 3: Disability + failure - effort and motivation

"a child would prefer to be seen as unwilling rather than unable." (Barry Lorinstein)

Stage 4: Disability + failure - effort and motivation + mental/emotional distress

the child is disempowered and believes that whatever happens is due to factors over which they have no influence.

No one is actually independent. We are all interdependent. The difference between the needs that many Disabled people have and the needs of people who are not labeled as disabled is that non-disabled people have had their dependencies normalized.

Ki'tay Davidson

- *What media portrayals of madness and institutionalization did you grow up with?*

- *Do you feel safe talking about your own mental health in your relationships? Your workplace?*

- *Are you automatically afraid or uncomfortable when you see people moving differently, slurring, stimming, rocking, or gesturing?*

- *Did you grow up with caretakers who struggled with mental health or who were Disabled? Or who used substances? How did that impact your feelings about mental health?*

- *What are you working to unlearn?*