

Understanding and Challenging Ableism within Somatic Practices

Alex Iantaffi, PhD, MS, SEP, CST, LMFT





Overview

- Why do we need to talk about ableism and disability within somatic practices?
- Disabled people: infantilization, desexualization & vilification.
- Models of Disability & Ableism.
- Somatic Practices and ableism.
- Disability Justice Principles.
- Changing our thinking, not just our practices.
- Conclusions and questions.

Why Disability & Somatic Practices?



15%
OF GLOBAL POPULATION
EST. 1 BILLION PEOPLE
live with a disability

(World Report on Disability, 2011)

The infographic features a dark blue silhouette of a person with a cane on the left and a world map on the right, set against an orange background with a diagonal gradient.

Disability Impacts

ALL of US

COMMUNITIES HEALTH ACCESS

61 million adults in the United States live with a disability

Click for state-specific information →

■ People living with a disability
■ People living with no disability

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

The percentage of people living with disabilities is highest in the South

The infographic includes a map of the United States where each state is filled with human icons. Blue icons represent people with disabilities, and yellow icons represent people without. A legend below the map identifies the colors. A dashed line separates the national average from a callout for the South, which is highlighted in grey and contains a white map of the region.



Disability within somatic practices

- Our clients often come to us because of chronic pain issues
- Connection between trauma & health
- Impact of systemic trauma
- It's part of our curriculum (syndromes)
- Potential gaslighting of clients
- The impact of 'wellness culture' on disabled clients and providers

Disabled people & infantilization



Infantilization

- Talking to and treating disabled people as if they were young children
- Addressing people who appear abled when they are with disabled people (and assuming they are a carer)
- Lack of or limited sex education (while experiencing higher rates of abuse, including CSA)
- Not acknowledging or respecting disabled people's agency, independence & sovereignty over their bodies

Desexualization

- Desexualization instead of asexualization
- Invisibility & erasure of ace & aro disabled people
- Desexualization is the systemic divesting of disabled people's sexual agency, autonomy, and erotic capital.
- One of the most violent, systemic manifestation of desexualization (& eugenics) is the ongoing, non-consensual sterilization of disabled people with a uterus.

Let's check in...

What are you noticing in your...

Body (physical sensations)?

Thoughts?

Emotions?

Models of Disability & Ableism



Medical, Social, Feminist

Person?

Impairment?

Society?

Both/and?



Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unamid-photo/11177467026>

CN: swearing

Watch Video from:

<https://youtu.be/IelmZUxBIq0>

Somatic Practices & Ableism



Types of ableism

- Institutional (training)
- Interpersonal
- Internal

Forms of ableism can be:

- Hostile
- Benevolent
- Ambivalent

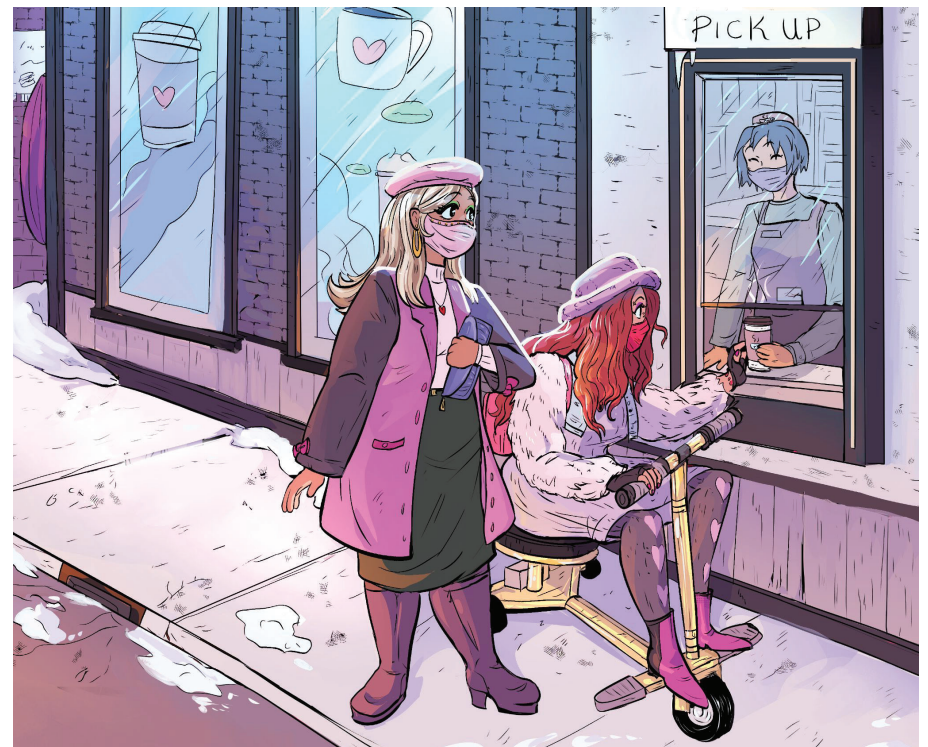


Image by Dominique Davis for [Disabled And Here](#).

Disability Justice Principles



INTERSECTIONALITY
LEADERSHIP OF THOSE
MOST IMPACTED
ANTI-CAPITALISM
cross-movement organizing
wholeness
sustainability
cross-disability solidarity
INTERDEPENDENCE
COLLECTIVE & collective
ACCESS *Liberation*

Final thoughts



Recognizing wholeness

- Challenging pathologization within somatic practices.
- Recognizing all bodyminds as valid.
- Recognizing the influence of ableism within dominant culture and within our practices.
- Understanding that healing from trauma needs to include challenging ableism within our field.

Changing our thinking, not just our practices



Potential questions for reflection

- How might your own positionality influence the way you approach disabled clients, colleagues, and students?
- What assumptions do you notice yourself making in those interactions?
- How do you notice ableism show up in your practice?
- What do you imagine the goal of somatic practices to be when working with disabled clients?

Merci beaucoup

Thank You

お疲れ様

Danke *Gracias*

Grazie

谢谢你

Thanks

Danke u

Obrigado

Contact Details:

alex@alexiantaffi.com

alexiantaffi.com

@xtaffi