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Human Rights-Based Social Work Education

Intersectional Deaf Feminism:

A Global Human Rights Framework for Social Work
Education

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Overview

This presentation will ground global deaf feminism as an entry point to incorporating lived experience of d/hh communities as an ethical and structural priority in social work education.

Theories that inform this work — Ubuntu and Global South feminisms challenge how knowledge and justice are defined.

Intersectionality is expanded to include audism, linguicism, and ableism — forces that shape Deaf and disabled experiences globally.

From there, Global Deaf Feminist framework is outlined concluding with practical steps for collaboration and curriculum design.

Learning Objectives:

1. Expand intersectionality to include audism, linguicism, and ableism within a global human rights framework
2. Learn importance of the integration of language, bodily autonomy, and cultural identity in understanding the lived realities of d/hh women, girls, and nonbinary individuals, into social work education to promote equity and disability justice
3. Use this framework from a human rights and intersectional feminism paradigm to be key partners in systemic change with d/hh women, girls, and nonbinary individuals.

Why this matters

Globally, over 1.5 billion people have some level of hearing loss

- 430 million have "disabling hearing loss" (WHO, n.d.)
- Will be 700 million by 2050



Hearing loss costs the global economy US \$980 billion annually

- Healthcare, educational supports, loss of productivity, societal costs

Theoretical Groundings: Global South Feminism

- Ubuntu: “I am because we are.”
- Feminism as relational and collective.
- Meekosha (2011): *Decolonising disability*
- Southern epistemologies

Making social work accessible

- Deaf and hard of hearing women and nonbinary individuals face compounded global inequities
- Social work curriculums can benefit from the addition of lived experiences of deaf and hard of hearing communities (Ogden et al., 2017; Kim & Sellmaier, 2020).



Expanding Intersectionality

Audism: Belief that hearing and speech are superior forms of communication.

Linguicism: Discrimination against signed or minority languages.

Ableism: Valuing productivity and “normalcy” over interdependence and access.

Introducing Global Deaf Feminism

- Builds on intersectional feminism + disability justice.
- Centers language, culture, and bodily autonomy.
- Addresses interlocking oppressions through human rights praxis.
- Frames inclusion as collective liberation, not charity, or an add-on.



Building foundations

- Chapple (2019) - articulated Black Deaf Feminism in U.S. context
 - Centers lived experiences of Black Deaf women facing double marginalization
 - Inspires global extensions recognizing racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity in deaf and hard of hearing communities
- Linguistic Human Rights - challenging monolingualism – recognizing multilingualism as critical component of equity
- DeafLatCrit (Garcia-Fernandez, 2023)
 - Experience co-oppressions of race and "double linguisticism"



Human rights

- Intersectionality and deaf and hard of hearing communities – recognizing "structural and social processes" rather than solely identity formation (Emery & Iyer, 2021)
- Scholarly colonialism – "production of impairment" (Meekosha, 2011)



Human rights

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD)
 - Recognizes right to signed languages
 - Valuing disabled bodies, neoliberal framing of what (or who?) is a productive member of society – bodily autonomy
- Other relevant conventions include: CRC, ICESCR, CEDAW, and CERD



Global Themes and Solidarity

- Migration and displacement: how language and access intersects
- Gender-based violence: Deaf and hard of hearing women face increased risk due to communication barriers
- Climate Justice: Disasters exacerbate inaccessibility and vulnerability
- Neoliberalism: effect on access to assistive technology, accessible healthcare and education
- Aging, Feminism, and the Devaluation of Care



Opportunities for Social Work Education

- Embed deaf/disability content across core curricula
 - DisCrit, DeafCrit, Black Deaf Feminism, DeafLatCrit
- Medical model to Rights-based framing; disability justice principles
- Partner with those who have lived experiences and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)
- Ethical framing – co-optation vs. solidarity

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Questions

- Email: