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Table of Contents

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
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Editorial

Effecting Systemic Change: Critical Strategic Approaches for Social Inclusion

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Abstract
This thematic issue focuses on critical, insightful, and innovative strategic approaches to social inclusion through a change in social systems. Contributions propose effective and responsive approaches, principles, practices, and/or models for impactful systemic change towards meaningful and practical social inclusion in our institutions, communities, and societies, adopting a systemic view—a wide-angle lens—to explore opportunities for transformation.

Keywords
civil society organizatons; disabilities; health policy; refugees; social services; systems analysis; systems change; women's reproduction

Issue
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We find ourselves in a political and social moment of tense distrust and growing divides, along with deep disappointment in institutions and initiatives that are ostensibly intended to provide social and economic support, promote social inclusion, and build community. A collective cynicism has settled in for a wide range of sociodemographic groups in societies, as the precarity of day-to-day life leaves many feeling vulnerable, powerless, and even fearful (Camfield, 2017; Haiven & Khasnapbish, 2014). A critical analysis of the dynamics that lead to such conditions demands a shift from a familiar neo-liberal perspective that perpetuates the "cult of the individual and 'individualism'" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 11), to a focus on the systemic processes and practices that contribute to the further marginalization of the marginalized (Mulé, 2011). Yet how does one effect change within such systems? Should such systems be dismantled and reconstructed? Or abolished altogether?

In this thematic issue, we feature articles offering critical, insightful, and innovative strategic approaches to social inclusion through a change in social systems. There is much in the literature regarding the need for systemic change to address growing divides within and between nations that leave many individuals and groups increasingly marginalized and disenfranchised (Kat͡senelinboïgen, 2020; Wagener, 1993), yet there's very little on *how* this can be done (Aragón & Giles Macedo, 2010; Murphy & Jones, 2021). Global crises have drawn attention to the disproportionate vulnerabilities and hardships experienced by people who are immigrants and refugees, living with disabilities, LGBTQ, Black and Indigenous, low income, precariously employed, elderly, young and female workers, to name a few. Perhaps as never before, there is widespread recognition that social institutions and systems have let many of us down. The public health, labour, and resulting economic crises of the Covid-19 pandemic have given rise to calls to "build back better" (Funnell et al., 2023). Given the paucity of academic literature that proposes and operationalizes systemic analyses and change strategies to promote dynamics of social inclusion rather than social exclusion, we were motivated to begin to fill that gap.

Contributing authors of this thematic issue adopt a systemic view—a wide-angle lens—that analyses social institutions and societies to be mutually productive and malleable, rather than self-reproducing and inevitable, to explore opportunities for transformation (Good Gingrich & Lightman, 2015; Mulé, 2019). Such perspectives contest common sense notions of social exclusion that inspire static, categorical, and individualized models of social inclusion geared toward people-change measures for identified social kinds. This ideal of social inclusion implies and conceals an uncontested "centre" or series of "centres" whereby voluntary engagement or mandatory insertion moves an individual from social exclusion to inclusion. But this common-sense idea of social inclusion is not for everyone. On the contrary, integration of the Other into the divided social spaces of the "centre" is impossible, as it is the exclusion of all that contradicts dominant norms and values that forms its very essence (Good Gingrich, 2016; Good Gingrich & Young, 2019).

A systems analysis is radical, as it reorients our gaze from the static conditions of the excluded kind to the relational and dynamic realities of social exclusion (Taket et al., 2009). The contributing authors of this thematic issue situate the social world as nested social environments, structured by and structuring various social systems and institutions, including business, labour, health, education, legal, political, and social service sectors—all of which are implicated in organizing individuals and communities, thus perpetuating social divides and disparities. Moreover, a systems analysis brings outcomes *and* processes into view (Mulé & DeSantis, 2017), to see and know the social dynamics and trends over time that result in everyday/every night realities in a moment in time. Such a view invites innovation in specific practices that challenge and interrupt those dynamics. The articles in this thematic issue offer effective and responsive approaches, principles, practices, and models for impactful systemic change, whether internally and/or externally, towards meaningful and practical social inclusion in our institutions, communities, and societies.

Löve (2023) examines an Icelandic governmental consultative process to address the needs of people with disabilities, and those with intellectual disabilities, in particular, towards their inclusion in policy making. Through a mixed methods qualitative approach, the author found the government fell short of adequate inclusion of the input and lived experiences of the specified populations, for they were not included in the latter crucial stages of preparing the implementation report of the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disability, capturing only parts of what people with intellectual disabilities shared during the consultations. Drawing from the literature, the author points to crucial steps the government missed in carrying out consultations for effective social changes through policy development. Such observations contribute important insights into addressing social exclusion through processes and practices of social inclusion.

Two case studies in the US regarding the education of refugees that exemplify refugee-driven models of integration and inclusion are shared by Greene et al. (2023). These examples lay out means of systemic change that get to the root causes via cultural humility. Situating practice approaches in their case examples, the authors clearly outline how a careful commitment to cultural humility must include reflexivity and relationship building, and importantly that change-making is more about the process than the outcome. Central to these transformational models are the refugees themselves, as their unique perspectives and knowledge are essential for effective innovation in the education system.

The profession of social work and its role in advancing social justice while inevitably perpetuating social injustices is critically examined by Köngeter and Schreiner (2023). The authors argue the importance of social service organizations engaging in inclusive processes of developing policies and services that centre the voices of the service recipients. The implications of this organizational education can promote systemic change at micro, meso, and macro levels. Core to this endeavour is a careful re-examination of the power differentials between social service organization staff and clients that in turn, opens a route to deeper self-determination and meaningful social inclusion for clients.

A nuanced analysis of policy regarding women's reproductive decision-making in Victoria, Australia, is undertaken by Haintz et al. (2023). The extent to which intersectionality is taken up in reproductive health policy was found to be inconsistent both within and across the policies examined. These authors show that policy can have a direct exclusionary impact on reproductive decision-making when intersectional recognition is not captured. Overlooking (or denying) the realities of intersectional power dynamics has negative consequences that are most severe for marginalized women and, in turn, emphasizes the importance of the meaningful engagement of diverse women in policy development. Intentional reflexivity in policymaking is imperative for the effective regulation of reproductive decision-making.

Through autoethnographic case studies, McKenzie and Khan (2023) share their personal experiences as disabled faculty members of a faculty of social work at a Canadian university. They highlight the numerous ways in which the neoliberal university system contributes to social exclusion despite surface efforts to implement principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Much of this is due to ensconced working dynamics in academia that emphasize individualism, efficiency, and productivity that falls short of considering equitable access to resources to do such work, and usually at the expense of work-life balance and personal care. Utilizing intersectionality and disability justice theoretical frameworks, the authors challenge such work notions in academia by providing strategies geared towards social inclusion in the social work discipline that is applicable to other disciplines within post-secondary institutions.

Banerjee (2023) takes on an intensely systemic approach to the challenges of civil society organizations (CSOs) engaging in social inclusion initiatives in response to increasing neoliberal governmentality in India. The author reports that in this context, both government and donor institutions are imposing more and more procedures that in effect decapacitate and depoliticize CSOs. As a result, their much-needed political work towards effecting social change has been reduced to service provision that is disconnected from participation in the political process. Banerjee identifies a shift from resistance (a fight for social change) to resilience (finding new ways to work within the system), but argues that these two concepts are not binary nor mutually exclusive. Finding resilience within an ever-constrictive yet changing system can in turn lead to new powers of resistance—a re-politicization.

Finally, in an innovative way, Skyer et al. (2023) conflate anarchistic principles and practices with deaf advocacy for system change in deaf education. The longstanding conflict of approaches between the biomedical and the sociocultural within deaf education systems are taken up at the micro level, with a view to macro implications by centring the deaf. Outlined are four themes of social inclusionary practice that can be shared between anarchistic groups and deaf communities. These include collectivism, mutual aid, direct action tactics, and a form of self-governance. The authors argue that by merging anarchistic principles and approaches with the will of deaf communities regarding their own education, real opportunity for deaf-positive system change, as guided by the deaf themselves, is possible.

A common theme among all of the contributions in this thematic issue is that of centring the voices and agency of those most negatively impacted by social exclusion. This, in turn, calls for a redistribution of power, in which professionalized notions and procedures need to be disrupted and reoriented towards not only the issues of but the ideas and approaches put forth by those who will most benefit from interrupting dynamics of social exclusion.

Through a range of applications, the contributors bring to our attention that social inclusion is not so much an outcome that is evidenced by change *to* or *for* excluded individuals. Rather, social inclusion is *dynamic*, requiring processes and practices that re-value devalued perspectives, knowledges, and people for collective change. All authors engage with conceptual, empirical, or theoretical perspectives that delve deeply into critical thought and analysis that go to the core of systemic issues—"the causes of the causes"—to posit strategic approaches to systemic transformation. Each of these contributions goes beyond a mere critique of what ails our social systems, importantly offering approaches to address various forms of social exclusion. Some applications are premised on a particular social location or with regard to a specific sector, but each one transcends such positionalities towards processes and practices of social inclusion that involve transformation at all levels—personal, relational, institutional, and societal—for the benefit of all.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Exclusion to Inclusion: Lived Experience of Intellectual Disabilities in National Reporting on the CRPD

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Abstract

This article critically examines the application of an innovative project aimed at developing a mechanism for people with intellectual disabilities to provide input to the Icelandic government's report on its implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD). The project was undertaken to comply with the CRPD's obligation to ensure the participation of disabled people in the review process and to respond to the recognized need for changes to consultation processes to accommodate the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. The project was successful in producing its intended outcome, to facilitate meaningful input by people with intellectual disabilities to the national review process. However, the research reveals that effective use of the outcome report by the authorities, which had both funded the project and praised its work, was lacking. These findings draw attention to the need to address unspoken norms and biases, and to take assertive steps to institutionalize a more structured and transparent process of co-creation to ensure that the voices of marginalized groups are in fact heard and effectively taken into account in outcome processes. The research this article draws on is qualitative, comprised of data gathered through document analysis, as well as in-depth interviews with representatives of disabled people's organizations and the authorities.

Keywords

Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities; effective participation; inclusion; intellectual disabilities; marginalization

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1. Introduction

The right to make decisions in one's own life is regarded as an inherent human right and is perceived by most people as so self-evident that the fact that it is not stated as such by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) rarely draws much concern. It is, therefore, eye-opening to realize that this right is truly at the heart of the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations, 2006) and its aim to uproot what has been the accepted and mostly unquestioned norm, that decisions be taken on behalf of disabled people by third parties (Quinn, 2010). It is a practice that has served to disempower and marginalize disabled people and that the CRPD aims to reverse.

The CRPD approaches the right to decision-making regarding one's own affairs from different angles. It establishes the right to legal capacity in article 12 and the right to independent living as a human right in Article 19 (Brennan et al., 2016). In article 4.3, it obligates States Parties to the Convention to ensure the participation of disabled people, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the development of laws and policies that affect them. Finally, article 33.3 states the right of disabled people and disabled people's organizations (DPOs) to take part in the CRPD's monitoring process as States Parties report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (also referred to here as the CRPD Committee or simply the Committee) on measures taken and progress made in its implementation. States Parties are required to submit an initial report to this committee two years after ratification and then every four years (article 35). Considering the focus of this article, it is important to note that the participation process called for in articles 4.3 and 33.3 should be broadly interpreted and calls for the representation of the great diversity that exists among disabled people as a group, including the diverse forms of impairment (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2018; Löve et al., 2019).

While the right to participate in public and political life is firmly rooted in human rights law and international agreements, disabled people and DPOs have traditionally been excluded from decision-making mechanisms and are rarely consulted concerning the development and implementation of decisions that affect their lives (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2018; McVeigh et al., 2021). Even when States Parties to the CRPD have incorporated obligatory consultations with DPOs, it often remains unclear whether such measures do, in fact, enable them to affect policy outcomes as intended (Löve et al., 2018; Sherlaw & Hudebine, 2015). Research shows that DPOs continue to report experiencing difficulties in being heard and resistance to their efforts to affect policy (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2018; Kumpuvuori & Virtanen, 2017; Löve et al., 2017; Waldschmidt et al., 2017). In this regard, the Committee draws attention to the need to bridge the observed gap between the "goals and the spirit of articles 4(3) and 33(3) and the degree to which they have been implemented" (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2018, para. 8), pointing out that this gap is in part due to the lack of meaningful consultation and co-production with disabled people, drawing on their lived experience and knowledge of the rights to be implemented. To this end, the Committee emphasizes the need to ensure that the views of persons with disabilities be given due weight in the process and "not only heard as a mere formality or as a tokenistic approach to consultation" (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2018, para. 48). It calls for the results of consultations to be taken into account and reflected in the decisions adopted. What is being called for is not only that States Parties make changes to their existing legal systems but also recognition of the fact that effecting change will test people's ability and willingness to change their often ingrained perceptions of disabled people as lacking in decision-making skills (Arstein-Kerslake, 2017). This is particularly relevant in the case of people with intellectual disabilities, who as a group are rarely viewed as fully valued contributors and whose incompetence to participate in decision-making is often assumed (Petri et al., 2017).

When claiming the right to effective participation in the decision-making of people with disabilities through their DPOs, it is important to recognize that hierarchies exist within disability movements themselves (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2019), where ranking is often based on the type or circumstance of impairment. People with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities are often the ones on the lowest rungs of the hierarchy and, thus, in a marginalized position within these movements (Deal, 2003; Szmukler et al., 2014). People with intellectual disabilities, therefore, often wield little power within DPOs and their voices are overlooked. Stratification within DPOs can thus further exacerbate the exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities from participation. As Petri et al. (2017) point out in their research on the CRPD review process:

> While implementation reports are usually developed by disabled people's organisations (DPOs) or human rights groups or state bodies, people with intellectual disabilities and autistic people almost never take a leading role in drafting such reports, let alone participate in drafting them.

The result is diminished opportunity to effectively express concerns and interests specific to their lives and circumstances. This is particularly concerning considering that people with intellectual disabilities are frequent users of services and support systems and have experienced disproportional rights abuses, and therefore have a significant stake in the matter.

These factors highlight the need to embed specific strategies and accommodations to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are able to fully participate and that their lived experience is recognized and incorporated as knowledge in policy making. It is, therefore, of interest to examine, as this research does, to what extent the outcome of a project funded by the Icelandic Ministry of Social Affairs, to ensure that the views of people with intellectual disabilities were included in Iceland's first national report to the CRPD Committee in 2021, following the country's ratification of the CRPD in 2016, succeeded in its intended purpose. Or, are further changes in line with the guidance provided by the CRPD Committee needed to uproot ingrown biases that prevent the contributions of people with intellectual disabilities from being effectively incorporated into the monitoring process? The monitoring process aims to bring national law and policy in line with the CRPD through an open and inclusive dialogue where the views of all parties are heard and taken into consideration (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2006; Quinn, 2009).

A body of research exists that has focused on the right of participation in policymaking and implementation from the perspective of DPOs, including Kumpuvuori and Virtanen (2017), who provide an analysis of what constitutes full and effective consultations, as called for by the CRPD; Sherlaw and Hudebine (2015), who focus on the issue from the French perspective, drawing attention to the lack of assurances that the voices of disabled people will be heard and taken into account; Levesque and Langford (2016), Lang et al. (2011), and McVeigh et al. (2021), who all focus on the issue from different national perspectives. However, to date, there is limited research that focuses specifically on the active participation of people with intellectual disabilities in consultation processes concerning implementation and policy development, as called for by the CRPD in articles 4.3 and 33.3 (Petri et al., 2017). Studies focusing on people with intellectual disabilities and implementation of the CRPD have instead primarily focused on specific rights, drawing on quality of life indicators (Gómez et al., 2020). These include Verdugo et al. (2012), Houseworth et al. (2019), Lombardi et al. (2019), Fisher et al. (2015), and Sheridan et al. (2019).

The aim of the project funded by the Icelandic Ministry of Social Affairs (hereafter referred to as the Fjölmennt project) was to support the participation of people with intellectual disabilities as part of the CRPD national reporting mechanism. The project was to deliver an outcome document that would reflect the voices and suggestions of people with intellectual disabilities on the implementation of the CRPD for inclusion in the national report.

The project represented the first time Iceland had taken direct steps to embed the voices of people with intellectual disabilities in a national implementation report to a human rights monitoring body. Furthermore, the project was innovative as its design was directed by the participants themselves and they also had final approval of the drafting of the outcome report. This approach differs from most inclusive research aimed at engaging the views and opinions of people with intellectual disabilities on particular issues and rights contained within the CRPD, which have primarily drawn on the use of focus groups, structured interviews and workshops (Garcia et al., 2014; Salmon et al., 2019).

Funding for the project was directed to NAPID—Iceland's National Association of People With Intellectual Disabilities (Þroskahjálp), the DPO that proposed the project to the Ministry of Social Affairs and contracted Fjölmennt adult education center to assist in developing the project design and overseeing its implementation. The project produced an outcome report entitled *What is the Experience of Disabled People? A Collaborative Project by Effort and The Ambassadors; Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities by Iceland* (Fjölmennt, 2019).

This article commences by introducing the research's theoretical foundations, which focus on the need to question taken-for-granted norms, structures, processes, and ingrained biases in order to change power relations regarding decision-making. Furthermore, the article draws attention to the concept of accommodations to support the effective participation of marginalized groups and, thus, their access to the means to change existing norms. The article continues by discussing the methodology used in the research, including a description of Fjölmennt's project design. The findings present the outcomes of the document analysis and in-depth interviews, followed by a discussion and analysis of the findings in the context of the research's theoretical approach and other research in this area.

2. Theoretical Approach

Critical theory and the critical theory approach—the origins of which can be traced to the work of a group of radical philosophers, economists, and sociologists better known as the Frankfurt School, which included Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse (Kellner, 1989, 1993; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009)—emphasizes that accepting existing norms, structures, and procedures serves to reinforce established power relations and, thus, also the marginalization of those deemed different and falling outside of the accepted norm. The dominance of the accepted norm also helps explain how procedures and practices throughout modern institutions have limited the autonomy of some groups more than others and their questioning of the status quo (Foucault, 2000). Fundamental to critical theory is the questioning of existing power dynamics and the need to expose and unveil them (Kellner, 1993; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Furthermore, critical theory identifies where change to dominant power balances will come from, arguing that it is dependent on those who are perceived as falling outside the norm obtaining the power and position to restate the underlying and often unquestioned norms (Minow, 1990; Young, 1990). To initiate change, it is, therefore, necessary to secure the actual and effective participation of marginalized groups within the democratic decision-making process as active participants in setting the agenda, defining the issues, and redefining the concepts that relate to their lives (Young, 1990). The focus on the importance of full and active participation by marginalized groups in the policymaking process has been emphasized by scholars that include Charlton (1998), Keys (2017), Oliver (1990), and Priestley et al. (2016).

The principle laid out by the CRPD in article 4.3., stating the right of disabled people to participate through their representative DPOs in decision-making in matters that concern them, reflects critical theory's emphasis on the need to secure the right of marginalized groups to participate in political decision-making processes. It recognizes that change must come from the participation of those who have been marginalized by the existing status quo. The CRPD refuses to accept what has been the unquestioned norm of who is involved in making disability policy, a stance further clarified by the CRPD Committee, which has emphasized that this right needs to reflect the great diversity of impairments and circumstances of disabled people (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2018). This position can in great part be attributed to the active participation of DPOs and international human rights organizations in the drafting of the CRPD, a document that changed the established norm of how and by whom disability policy is made (Löve et al., 2017).

3. Methods

The research this article draws on is qualitative, consisting of research data that includes document analysis and in-depth interviews. Document analysis was conducted of the outcome report developed by participants in the Fjölmennt project (Fjölmennt, 2019), and of Iceland's national report on the implementation of the CRPD, the *Initial Report Submitted by Iceland Under Article 35 of the CRPD*, submitted to the CRPD Committee (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2021). Analysis of documents also included related materials provided by the DPOs involved in the project, including letters, and memoranda. The documents amounted to 80 pages of text in total. Document analysis is a qualitative research method that systematically examines, evaluates, and interprets information contained therein to gain a more contextualized understanding. It regards documents as an important source of information, reflecting Atkinson and Coffey's (1997) argument that documents should be regarded as "social facts" that are both a product and a part of the social fabric (Bowen, 2009). Rather than just describing texts, document analysis digs deeper using context to gain a better understanding of their significance (Prior, 2003; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The national report was the product of a collaborative effort of six ministries that formed a working group tasked with drafting the report under the leadership of the Ministry of Welfare, the name of which had been changed to the Ministry of Social Affairs when the report was written. They included the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Ministry of Transport and Local Government, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (it should be noted that the names and portfolios of some of these ministries were changed again when a new government was formed in November 2021). Information for inclusion in the national report was drawn from diverse sources, including the ministries with each focusing on issues specific to their portfolio, government institutions, and the Association of Local Authorities, as well as representative associations of people with disabilities, public interest associations, academia, and the public (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2021). The Ministry of Welfare, now the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, led the process of drafting the text based on the information gathered. Upon completion, a draft report was published in the government consultation portal, thereby providing the public with an opportunity to express its views on the content. The finalized and approved text was submitted to the CRPD Committee in 2021.

Analysis of the selected documents consisted of their initial appraisal and close reading to gain a thorough understanding of their content. Data were then organized into themes with a focus on the three key concerns highlighted by project participants in the outcome report—housing, employment, and education—to be able to systematically evaluate how they relate to the wider context and other data the research draws on. Finally, case examples were selected.

In addition, five in-depth interviews were conducted, providing an opportunity to gain a more nuanced understanding and insight into the interpretation of those involved in the process. In-depth interviews are used here in combination with document analysis as a means of triangulation, drawing on different methodologies in studying an issue. The use of mixed-method makes it possible to develop a better and more nuanced understanding of the subject matter (Bowen, 2009).

Interviews were conducted with representatives of NAPID, which initiated the project and contracted Fjölmennt to carry it out. NAPID is a rights-based DPO that focuses primarily on the rights and interests of disabled children and people with intellectual disabilities. It is one of two Icelandic DPOs that have legally protected consultation status in policymaking on disability issues. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of Fjölmennt and the ministerial-level working group. Due to the very limited size of the Icelandic population and the importance of maintaining the anonymity of informants, a decision was taken not to identify the number of interviewees in these three categories further and to only refer to them as either representatives of a DPO or of the ministerial working group. A decision was made not to interview project participants for this research as their voices and opinions are reflected in the project outcome report.

Interviews were semi-structured and focused on three core themes: (a) the right to full and effective participation according to articles 4.3 and 33.3 of the CRPD, (b) obstacles to the realization of this right, and (c) the role of the project in actualizing this right. Participants were identified through purposive sampling, allowing the researcher to select informants who have particular experiences and insights of relevance to the study (Charmaz, 2014). The collection of interview data was directed by the constant comparative method of grounded theory. This method calls for data gathering to be continued while data is simultaneously coded and analyzed to identify central themes to help direct further data collection and theory building (Charmaz, 2014). The analysis consisted of close reading of the transcripts, followed by sorting and organization of emerging themes, revealing patterns in the data that helped develop a deeper understanding of the issues at hand (Creswell, 2009). The analysis revealed three dominant themes: (a) the importance of including the voices of people with intellectual disabilities in the consultation process, (b) the prevalence of tokenistic consultations, and (c) the need to provide adequate accommodation for people with intellectual disabilities.

The interviews, conducted between 2020 and 2021, were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed and coded. All participants gave informed consent and agreed to have the interviews recorded.

4. The Fjölmennt Project

The project participants were recruited from two groups of people that had been engaged in disability activism and self-advocacy: Effort (Átak), a self-advocacy organization, and The Ambassadors on the CRPD (Sendiherrarnir um samning Sameinuðu þjóðanna um réttindi fatlaðs fólks), an activist group made up of people with learning disabilities and related impairments who have specialized in the various articles of the CRPD and been active in promoting awareness towards it (Fjölmennt, 2019).

The participants numbered 20: 10 women and 10 men of different ages. All had intellectual disabilities or related impairments, and some had multiple impairments. Their circumstances varied; some lived independently, several had personal assistance, others lived in group homes or some form of assisted living arrangements, and a few lived with their parents. Some participants were parents themselves, some were employed or pursuing further education, and others took part in various occupational day programs.

Participants led decision-making on the development of the project to ensure their ownership of the outcome and that the agenda reflected the issues participants themselves deemed important to address. Support in carrying out the participants' decisions and on logistics was provided by staff from Fjölmennt, including transcribing focus group recordings, taking notes, and writing the outcome report. All written documents produced, and conclusions arrived at, were approved by the participants before the outcome document was finalized. All participants had prior knowledge of the CRPD, and in many cases had developed particular knowledge in focused areas around select articles.

Participants decided to limit their review to the progress made on 14 of the CRPD articles that they considered to be of most relevance to their lives and experiences, ranging from independence and the right to family life to political and cultural participation (articles 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, and 30). Six working groups were formed, each comprised of three to four persons. Each group reflected on the implementation of two to four articles of the CRPD and met between seven and nine times for approximately two hours at a time. All working group participants were paid for their work.

Five of the working groups conducted focus groups, consisting of four to eight participants each, to broaden the perspectives reflected in the outcome report. Support staff assisted in asking follow-up questions to encourage more in-depth answers. Working groups, furthermore, invited people to their discussions and undertook field trips to inspect accessibility.

Focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. The final report was developed by the working groups based on their own contributions and augmented by data from the focus groups. A support person from Fjölmennt facilitated the writing of the report but final approval of the text was in the hands of the members of the working groups.

5. Findings

A comprehensive review of the national report submitted by Iceland in 2021, following its obligation under article 35 of the CRPD, showed two direct references to the project's outcome report. The national report consisted of 289 paragraphs and provided a detailed overview of the measures taken by Iceland to fulfill its obligations as a State Party to the CRPD.

The first reference to the project's outcome report is in paragraph three, the introduction section, giving it a certain prominence and visibility. It states: "The National Association received a special grant from the Ministry of Social Affairs for the drafting of a report to be prepared by people with developmental disabilities, thereby reflecting their views and opinions regarding the implementation of the Convention" (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2021).

The second reference is found in paragraph 40 on the implementation of article 4.3 of the CRPD, stating:

> The report was prepared by people with developmental disabilities and it reflects their views and opinions regarding the implementation of the Convention. Átak, the Icelandic self-advocacy group, and a group of people called the ambassadors on the Convention, prepared the report together. The report states that the most pressing issues for people with disabilities are housing, employment and education. (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2021)

Review of the sections where the national report addresses progress on these three priority issues found no specific references to the recommendations made in the outcome report. Upon examination, several instances were identified where reference to it could have been made. For example, when reporting on the implementation of article 24, on education, the national report, in paragraph 204, discusses a two-year diploma for students with intellectual disabilities offered by the School of Education of the University of Iceland but without reference to the outcome report's observations on this program's limitations, particularly the very small number of students admitted to it and the need to expand the program to include education opportunities in other departments and fields within the university.

Progress on the implementation of article 27, on employment, is reviewed at length in the national report. It raises the issue of the persistent underemployment of people with disabilities, pointing out that while Iceland's overall employment rate stands at 86.5%, only about 10% of disabled people are fully employed. The project's outcome report addresses this issue, emphasizing in particular the need to increase the diversity of employment offered to disabled people, particularly people with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, the outcome report suggests adopting a new approach by focusing efforts increasingly on educating employers on the value of employing people with disabilities and the skills they can offer (Fjölmennt, 2019). This suggestion aligns with critical theory by proposing a shift to the established approach to addressing underemployment, which until now has almost exclusively focused on training disabled people to fit the labor market, with limited results as the statistics indicate.

Housing, the third priority issue identified in the outcome report, is closely connected to the right to independent living and full participation in society at all levels, which article 19 of the CRPD addresses. Implementation of article 19 was reviewed by the national report in 21 paragraphs where it points out that, at the end of 2018, there were still 228 people living in two institutions or group homes in Iceland (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2021, para. 156). This is an issue of particular interest to people with intellectual disabilities as they make up a significant portion of this population. The outcome report addresses this issue and emphasizes the importance of also providing personalized services within these service arrangements that focus on the right to make decisions in one's life. For example, the report suggests that service users be part of the hiring of staff that provides their services and that they have the right to have a say in with whom and where one lives (Fjölmennt, 2019).

The references to the Fjölmennt project in the national report focus primarily on the fact that it was undertaken but not on its content. The examples cited above may, therefore, be considered missed opportunities to effectively incorporate the perspectives of people with intellectual disabilities in the national report in a way that better reflected the stated goal of the project, as well as to more effectively incorporate the knowledge that lived experience brings, as the CRPD so clearly calls for (Löve et al., 2017). These findings are particularly noteworthy considering that the outcome report was characterized as "good work" by representatives of both the ministerial working group and DPOs. "It was well developed and presented. This was, this was really, just real work," said a representative of the ministerial working group. Similarly, a DPO representative stated: "These are people who can so well convey their perspective…they just need preparation, time, and space to develop sufficient understanding of what is being discussed. In my opinion, this was a very well carried out project.''

The in-depth interviews provide additional contextualized information. They reveal that DPO representatives perceived from the start that the Ministry of Social Affairs was supportive of the project. All the interviewees expressed a feeling of trust between the parties involved. "As soon as we suggested to the Ministry that we felt that this needed to be done, they immediately said yes," a DPO representative stated. Furthermore, they pointed out that funding was provided without any stipulations regarding how the project should be carried out. All further decision-making was left to Fjölmennt, which had been contracted to oversee the project development. As said by a DPO representative: "The funding came with no instructions. Just the title question: What is the experience of disabled people of the implementation of the Convention?" The interviews also revealed a shared acknowledgment of the importance of including the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in consultation processes in general.

However, DPO representatives also drew attention to the danger of the project becoming "window dressing" rather than the genuine input to the national report that it was intended to be. "It's not really a positive development unless there are plans to have this impact what is then presented" (DPO representative). "Their voices must be the ones that are heard. It's the authorities' responsibility to take them seriously and include them in the report" (DPO representative). This was a recurring theme in interviews with DPO representatives who also expressed that they often perceived there to be a lack of deeper understanding among the authorities of the purpose of consultations, pointing out examples that they perceived to be tokenistic:

> When one person with intellectual disabilities is in a group with others at a municipal office, with people in positions of authority and professionals….She arrives without being told what will be discussed. And then someone turns to her and asks what do you have to say on this issue? (DPO representative)

Addressing the limited direct reference to the outcome report, a representative of the ministerial working group emphasized that comments and suggestions received were incorporated in a more general way and, as such, were filtered throughout the national report. A representative of the ministerial working group chimed in: "This is a picture in time, not a word-by-word account but rephrased. It is the underlying understanding that we are trying to convey.''

Analysis of the national report does, however, reveal examples of other reports used to highlight issues of concern. In some instances, the examples are stated without much elaboration, while in other cases the findings of the respective reports are given considerable room and reflection. In this context, it is important to keep in mind that no other project or report referenced is recognized as having been specifically conducted to provide input to the national report.

An example of substantive use of a report can be found in the section on the implementation of article 13, where the national report, in paragraphs 114 and 115, makes good use of the findings of a working group appointed by the State Prosecutor on the handling of sexual offenses in cases where the suspect and/or victim is disabled. Another is in a section on the implementation of article 8 of the CRPD, where key findings of a study by the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland are discussed and presented (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2021, para. 65). In addition, recommendations of a working group convened under the auspices of the Minister of Health on assistive device systems are presented in paragraph 173 on implementation of article 19 (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2021).

The findings, thus, suggest missed opportunities in making more effective use of the project's outcome report in line with the CRPD Committee's guidance that consultations be effectively taken into account and reflected in outcomes adopted. This is of interest in light of the support for the project shown by the authorities, which draws attention to the need to gain a better understanding of what changes to process norms are needed to combat potential unintentional underlying bias when it comes to listening to what people with intellectual disabilities have to contribute about their circumstances and needs. To address this concern, the next section of this article draws on research in the field and guidance provided by General Comment No. 7 where the CRPD Committee addresses what constitutes inclusive and participatory policy-making and provides guidance on how to ensure full, effective, and inclusive participation (Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2018).

6. Discussion

Asserting the right to make decisions regarding one's affairs is a key focus of the CRPD and reflects its emphasis on reversing an ingrained and long-standing practice of others making decisions on behalf of disabled people. This practice has been particularly persistent concerning people with intellectual disabilities, who, as a group, have also often found themselves lacking representation within DPOs, resulting in their interests and views being overlooked (Deal, 2003; Szmukler et al., 2014).

The project this research focuses on was intended to respond to the CRPD's call for diversity of representation, with a focus on people with intellectual disabilities as a marginalized group within the larger group of disabled people. As the findings reveal, the project succeeded in providing meaningful substantive inputs to Iceland's national report to the CRPD Committee that reflected the views and suggestions of people with intellectual disabilities, which Petri et al. (2017) had found to be lacking in reporting processes. However, the research also found that ensuring effective participation in the writing of a consultation report did not suffice; obstacles remain to achieve the goal of full and effective inclusion in the co-creation of policy, or, as in this case, the national reporting that the CRPD calls for. The findings revealed that in the national report's accounting of progress on issues in the three areas that were highlighted as of particular concern for people with intellectual disabilities, there was a lack of direct reference to the suggestions made by project participants, which this research identifies as a missed opportunity.

It is important to keep in mind, as Quinn (2009) points out, that the ultimate goal of the monitoring process is to transport the values of the CRPD into domestic policy. This process, as the Committee so clearly stresses, should be guided by consultations with disabled people and their representative organization where the value and knowledge of lived experience of diverse impairments and disabilities is recognized and effectively taken into consideration, the aim being to incorporate this knowledge in national policy-making. It is a position that recognizes the argument that, to change ingrained and accepted norms, marginalized groups such as people with intellectual disabilities must be active participants throughout the decision-making process to be able to effectively change and redefine accepted norms and structures (Young, 1990). It is not enough to create a platform to express opinions; there must also, as the Committee emphasizes, be a strategic and transparent effort to take into account and reflect the results of such consultations in decision-making. The Committee, furthermore, recognizes that ingrown biases need to be uprooted to prevent the tendency of consultations from becoming more of a formality or tokenistic, a concern that was also expressed in the interviews with DPOs representatives.

The findings are also noteworthy in light of the support for the project shown by the authorities, both in terms of funding and its recognition of the quality of its outcome report. They draw attention to the need to examine further and address possible ingrown and often unconscious biases affecting whose knowledge is heard and effectively included in decision-making and to respond by embedding measures in the decision-making process to combat them. Such biases are, as Petri et al. (2017) point out, often especially relevant in the case of people with intellectual disabilities. These biases are culturally embedded and socially invested and serve to determine which differences are assigned a label of otherness, preventing access to full inclusion and effective contribution (Altermark, 2017).

As a group, people with intellectual disabilities are often not viewed as fully valued contributors, and their incompetence to participate in decision-making is often assumed. They may, therefore, find it difficult, as Sinclair (2005) points out, to gain a position where their knowledge is recognized and accepted on an equal basis with others. The dilemma, he points out, is that when marginalized and disempowered groups seek to challenge their presumed incompetence and to claim equality to others, they are often met with attempts to discredit their claim to knowledge (Sinclair, 2005). The result is the devaluation of their voices, and their position of marginalization is reaffirmed. Such ingrained biases, including which knowledge base is deemed valuable, reflect existing power balances, and serve to reinforce the status quo (Minow, 1990; Young, 1990), highlighting the need for changes to the underlying power structures.

The findings of this research raise the question of what qualifies as actual and inclusive participation. According to Kumpuvuori and Virtanen (2017), full participation requires that the participation of DPOs must be continuous, from the very beginning of the policy formulation process to its conclusion. In addition, the opinions and suggestions made by DPOs must be taken into account by policymakers and not ignored. They identify as illusionary forms of participation where there is no real opportunity to affect the outcome of a co-production process because, even though opportunity is given to participate in the process, contributions and opinions are not taken into account (Kumpuvuori & Virtanen, 2017). This question is also addressed in the guidance provided by the CRPD Committee in General Comment No. 7, where it emphasizes that consultations should be initiated in a timely manner and that the process should be adapted to fit the needs of different participants, including by providing all relevant information in an accessible form with reasonable accommodation, such as Easy Read text. It warns against consultations becoming a formality or tokenistic and emphasizes that the results of consultations be taken into account and reflected in decisions adopted. The guidelines also call on States Parties to inform participating DPOs of the outcome of consultation processes and to provide explanations and "considerations and reasoning of decisions, on how their views were considered and why" (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2018). In addition, the Committee has emphasized the importance of instituting independent frameworks such as National Human Rights Institutions and other formalized mechanisms to ensure that the voices of disabled people and their representative organizations are both heard and recognized in the production of reports and policy analysis (Caughey & Liu, 2022). In this way, General Comment No. 7 lays out a process for the co-production of policy where the outcome is co-owned by all parties involved. The CRPD, thus, reflects the critical theory emphasis on the need for changes to process norms so that marginalized groups such as disabled people are systematically included as part of the decision-making process and can gain the access necessary to change their position of marginalization within society. In both cases, the emphasis is on instituting accountability and transparency throughout the decision-making processes.

Thus, while the Fjölmennt project represents an effort to change the accepted practice of others speaking on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities, change also calls for an evaluation and monitoring of the prevalence of ingrown biases at every level of the process to more thoroughly uproot existing power balances regarding whose knowledge is included. It is not enough to invite consultation, as the CRPD Committee so clearly empathizes; there must also be an effort to listen and a willingness to embed the voices and opinions of disabled people in decisions taken.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest that when it comes to effective participation in policy development, as called for by the CRPD, underlying power balances have to an extent remained unchanged when it comes to people with intellectual disabilities, who, as Sinclair (2005) points out, face significant hurdles when it comes to their knowledge being recognized on an equal basis with others. Substantively, their suggestions and comments were not explicitly given voice in the national report to the CRPD Committee, calling to mind the concern raised by representatives of DPOs interviewed, who echoed the Committee's warning that consultations mustn't become a formality or tokenistic, drawing attention to the underlying biases that continue to affect the perception of disabled people as lacking the capacity to manage their own affairs.

This recognized but often unconscious bias against disabled people, and in particular people with intellectual disabilities as a subset within that group, draws attention to the need to embed further safeguards in the consultation process. The guidance provided by the CRPD Committee could help in this regard by providing more transparency to the reasoning behind decisions taken, including explanations of how and why DPO suggestions and comments are or are not included in policy documents, including implementation reports.

While this research specifically addresses the case of people with intellectual disabilities, its findings may have relevance for other marginalized groups that have limited access to decision-making processes. Groups such as immigrants or homeless people may find themselves in a similar situation where, because of ingrained biases and the devaluation of their knowledge, their suggestions and views are not fully recognized. As in the case of people with intellectual disabilities, this may result in a lack of access to effective participation in consultation processes and, thus, a lack of means to change their position of marginalization and to affect policy in matters that concern their affairs.

The findings indicate the need for additional measures to change established patterns of how consultations are integrated into policy development by institutionalizing a more structured and transparent process. Without such a formalized process, the underlying power balances are likely to go unchanged and it will continue to be left to the interpretation of governmental and political actors to decide whether and to what extent suggestions and reports are incorporated in the final decision-making process, without having to account for these decisions.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

Social and Curricular Inclusion in Refugee Education: Critical Approaches to Education Advocacy

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Abstract

Recognizing refugee students, families, and communities as a source of knowledge and social change, this article offers two case studies of innovative, deliberative, and labor-intensive practices toward meaningful social inclusion of refugee parents and students in education. The first example focuses on the multiyear effort by the Parent-Student-Resident Organization (PSRO) in San Diego, California, an education advocacy group organized and led by local parents to institutionalize social inclusion programs for refugees and other systemically excluded students. The second example analyzes the Refugee Teaching Institute in Merced, California, organized with the Critical Refugee Studies Collective (CRSC), to work with teachers to create a refugee-centered curriculum. In both case studies, organizers depart from deficit models of refugee education by foregrounding student and parent empowerment and bringing together diverse stakeholders to generate and implement a shared vision for teaching and learning. Through sharing insights glimpsed from participant observation and extended conversations with participants in each case study, this article shifts the reference point in refugee education from that of school authorities to that of refugees themselves. Through reflecting on the challenges of effecting systemic change, we argue for a model of educational transformation that is ongoing, intentionally collaborative, and cumulative.

Keywords

critical refugee studies; cultural humility; curricular inclusion; refugee education advocacy; refugee teaching; social inclusion; systems change

Issue

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1. Introduction

Since the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980—the first comprehensive US immigration law to address the admission of refugees—more than three million refugees have been resettled in the United States (US Department of State, n.d.). As one of the top resettlement states in the nation, California welcomed about 10% of refugee arrivals between 2010 and 2021 (Monin et al., 2021); between 2009–2013, 20% of the 941,000 children with refugee parents living in the US resided in California (Hooper et al., 2016, p. 14). As schools are considered key to the successful resettlement of refugee children and their families (McBrien, 2005), it is vital that local schools develop strategies to ensure their educational inclusion. However, research on the particular needs of refugee students in the United States remains scant (Koyama & Bakuza, 2017; Shapiro et al., 2018, p. 333), in part due to gaps in data availability for refugee students in US schools (Wiseman & Bell, 2021). As a result, US education researchers and policymakers often lump together refugee, immigrant, and English language learners, contributing to the invisibility of refugee students in academic literature, policy, and the classroom (McBrien, 2005, p. 337; Oikonomidoy, 2010, p. 75). This lumping practice disregards the distinct challenges refugee students face, which include experiences of forced displacement, interrupted or limited education, protracted stays in refugee camps, lack of educational documentation, loss and separation, violence and persecution, and mental health care needs (Cun, 2019; Merry et al., 2017). Although the official discourse of most school policies is to welcome refugees, schools often lack trauma-informed approaches to education that do not pathologize and diminish refugee students and their parents (Roxas & Roy, 2012, p. 469). Existing research on refugee education indicates that US schools have mostly responded to the challenge of refugee education within the logic of the existing education system, relying on ad-hoc strategies (Fix et al., 2001) rather than on an intentional systems change to include refugee students. In this article, we thus offer two case studies of innovative, deliberative, and labor-intensive efforts toward the social inclusion of refugee students and their parents in the education system.

Addressing the underrepresentation of refugee voices in education scholarship, and challenging the persistent deficit positioning of refugee students as a problem to be solved, this study adopts a critical refugee studies approach that centers the agency and efficacy of refugee students, parents, and communities, reframing them as enactors of systems change in education (Espiritu et al., 2022). While previous studies have focused on whether and how school authorities support and integrate refugee students and their families into the existing education system, this article examines how two refugee-led programs in California reimagined and restructured two core areas in kindergarten through 12th grade (K–12) refugee education: *social* and *curricular* inclusion. Our first case study focuses on the efforts of the Parent-Student-Resident Organization (PSRO) in San Diego to develop an infrastructure across school sites that enables the social inclusion of students with interrupted formal education (SIFE). The second case study analyzes the curriculum innovations and teaching strategies offered by the Refugee Teaching Institute (RTI) in Merced, organized by the Critical Refugee Studies Collective (CRSC). All three authors have extensive experience working with the PSRO and the CRSC, and with refugee communities more generally. Dan Nyamangah, a senior community organizer with Social Advocates for Youth (SAY) San Diego, organizes the PSRO. Yến Lê Espiritu, a founding member of the CRSC, co-organized the RTI and also collaborates with the PSRO. Alexandra Greene, a PhD candidate at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, works alongside the PSRO to document their advocacy model and also collaborates with the CRSC. Through documenting promising practices and processes, as well as ongoing barriers to achieving long-term, lasting change, glimpsed from participant observation and extended conversations with participants in each case study, we adhere to a "collaborative inquiry" approach (Ainscow, 2005) that centers refugee students and parents as enactors of meaningful educational inclusion.

In both case studies, refugee organizers intentionally bring together school administrators, teachers, and counselors, with refugee students, parents, and community groups to generate systemic change on how refugee students should and could be included and taught in US schools. Although integration and inclusion are often used interchangeably, we define integration as a process of gaining access to an existing system, and inclusion as a comprehensive approach to participation in which spaces are created that value and center refugee perspectives and wisdoms (Ghorashi, 2021, p. 88). As such, our inclusive education approach reflects "a move from a deficit model of adjustment towards systemic change," insisting that it is the system that is required to change to accommodate students (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001, p. 306). In offering new ways of theorizing refugee education, as well as reflective accounts of challenges to deepening inclusion, we aim to unsettle the system of education by elevating and engaging refugees' subjectivities, knowledge, expertise, and creativity.

We define a systems change approach to education as one that aims to address the root causes and underlying structures and relationships that reproduce educational inequalities. At the same time, we reflect critically on the challenges inherent in effecting systemic change, and caution against piecemeal reform approaches that fail to challenge existing power dynamics, structures, and mindsets that conceptualize refugee students and their families only as problems to be solved and as peripheral to changemaking. The evidence of our case studies indicates that meaningful, respectful, and ongoing partnerships with refugee communities and advocates are key for a systems change in refugee education. We also found that a systems change requires time, humility, reflective practice, and ongoing relationship-building, as well as adjustments along the way. As such, we offer and advocate for an approach to change that attends to the practices and processes of changemaking—and not only to outcomes.

2. Who Is a Refugee? A Critical Refugee Studies Redefinition

The Refugee Act (1980) defines "refugee" as a person who is "unable or unwilling" to return to their homelands because of a "well-founded fear of persecution"—a standard stipulated by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This definition has remained the basis of refugee "protection" in the United States and elsewhere, despite its inability to account for the multiplicity and complexity of refugee-producing conditions and refugee claims, which include climate crisis, occupation, and internal displacement (Espiritu et al., 2022, Chapter 1). Moreover, the interpretation and application of the US Refugee Act is a powerful and deeply political process determined by the state (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; McBrien, 2005), which renders the category of refugee neither stable nor neutral. Adopting a critical refugee studies approach, we move beyond the legal definition of refugee that is premised on "fear and persecution," redefining "the refugee" instead as "all human beings forcibly displaced within or outside of their land of origin…regardless of their legal status" (Espiritu et al., 2022, p. 72). This expanded definition includes those who self-identify as refugees, even though they may be subsumed under other state-generated labels like "asylum seeker" and/or "undocumented." In offering a redefinition of "the refugee," critical refugee studies recognizes and insists that "refugee" is a status that the statutory powers of international and state laws do not have sole and privileged authority to determine. As such, a key premise of critical refugee studies is that the worlds of refugees are much more than precarity and (il)legality, and foregrounds instead refugee epistemologies, creativity, and strategies (Espiritu et al., 2022).

Departing from existing paradigms that conceptualize refugees only in relation to the nation-state, we intentionally foreground "refugee"-ness (Malkki, 1992) and use the word "refugee" not only as a descriptive term referring to people with (current/former, formal/informal) refugee status under the Refugee Act (1980), but also as a "crucial analytical term and category for situating and naming a critique, as such terms as Black, Indigenous, Transgender, and many other (self)-identifying labels do," that integrates theoretical and political concerns with refugees' lived worlds (Espiritu et al., 2022, p. 12). In doing so, we reject the reification of the term "refugee" as only a legal classification in accordance with US immigration law. Given the "ontologizing force" (Górska, 2016, p. 59) of language, we do not use "refugee" to refer to a state-derived legal and immigration status, but to affirm and honor the ways in which the participants at the heart of this study derive their advocacy from their lived experiences as forcibly displaced people. The term refugee then is not a descriptor but a critical analytic to accentuate refugee advocacy and call into question and illuminate the relationships between theory, practice, politics, and the lifeworlds of refugees themselves.

3. Critical Refugee Studies Concepts: Cultural Humility and Refugee Teaching

The bulk of scholarly literature on refugee schooling focuses on the significant barriers faced by refugees, and on the oft-inadequate institutional responses to the challenge of integrating refugee students into "mainstream" education (McBrien, 2005). Along the same line, the limited research on refugee parents' interactions with US schools has largely adopted a deficit framework that focuses on the steep challenges refugee parents purportedly confront in supporting their children's academic success (Camino & Krulfeld, 1994, p. xii). Deficit models of refugee education characterize refugee parents as passive, indifferent, or lacking, and underestimate their capacity to effect systemic change (Cureton, 2020; Isik-Ercan, 2018, pp. 1–2; Koyama & Bakuza, 2017), thereby denying refugee parents' knowledge, efficacy, and agency (Koyama & Bakuza, 2017). Moreover, since perceptions of refugee parents as uneducated and uninformed on parenting and child development remain pervasive in many schools, many displaced parents experience being demeaned or disregarded by school teachers and leaders (Isik-Ercan, 2018). This deficit model of thinking thus positions refugees as "vulnerable problems" to be solved only through school intervention (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 112). Departing from the social science scholarship that erases refugees' experiences, heterogeneity, and agency, we situate our article in critical refugee studies, whose objective is to produce knowledge that is not only about but also *by* and *for* refugees (Espiritu et al., 2022). While the literature on refugee education largely adopts a "trauma discourse that perpetuates and pathologizes refugees in unproductive ways" (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 119), a critical refugee studies approach emphasizes the concepts of cultural humility and refugee teaching by foregrounding relationships and the lifeworlds, epistemologies, and actions of refugees.

3.1. Cultural Humility

First proposed in the medical field by Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) as an alternative to traditional models of cultural competency, which treated culture as static, or suggested discrete endpoints to practitioners' "mastery" in understanding so-called "others," cultural humility is less about defining "culture" and more about crafting an ethical positioning of openness to the lived experiences of others (Haynes-Mendez & Engelsmeier, 2020 p. 25). Cultural humility thus entails a culture of humility characterized by lifelong learning, reflexivity, and power-sensitive solidarities that are meaningful and mutually empowering. Central to cultural humility's framework is its focus on diverse perspectives, relationality, and the ways in which structural forces not only shape community members' experiences but practitioners' approaches and capacities for action (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015, p. 169). Individual, collective, and institutional accountability is thus recognized as interconnected (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). Yet, despite cultural humility's wide adoption in medicine, nursing, public health, community psychology, and social work, there are few examples of what cultural humility looks like in the context of education (Lund & Lee, 2015, p. 10). Moreover, the few studies that do exist tend to focus on fostering cultural humility in teachers (e.g., Brown et al., 2016), rather than on community-led education advocacy in school settings. Given these gaps in the research, this article introduces an innovative refugee-led example of cultural humility in practice, where collective action promotes collaborative decision-making for education advocacy and policy-level systems change.

3.2. Refugee Teaching

The promise of education as the key to integrating refugees is often accompanied by a narrative of victimhood, in which "teachers are there to rescue refugee children who are in need of care and tutelage" (Espiritu et al., 2022, p. 103). Recognizing refugee students and their families as a source of knowledge rather than a problem to be solved, critical refugee studies insists on transforming the learning space by acknowledging, engaging, and elevating refugees' own experiences, knowledge, and creativity. Critical refugee studies thus flip the script on refugee education by emphasizing *refugee teaching* rather than *teaching refugees*, with refugee teaching defined to include teaching *by* refugees in collaboration with their families and communities (Espiritu et al., 2022, pp. 103–104). Centering refugee knowledges, subjectivities, and lifeworlds, refugee teaching invites educators to address these questions: How to implement strategies for teaching that honor the unique experiences of refugee students? How to design curricula that center refugee perspectives, agency, and epistemologies? How to make refugee teaching social and affiliative, producing and reproducing community? Refugee teaching thus shifts the reference point in refugee education studies from that of school authorities to that of refugees themselves, insisting that school authorities engage refugee students and their parents and communities as agents of systems change.

4. Parent-Student-Resident Organization: Setting a Foundation for Community Schools

4.1. Social Inclusion of Refugee Students

This section focuses on the efforts of the PSRO in San Diego to develop a comprehensive structure for the social inclusion of SIFE. While the social integration of immigrants (including refugees) into the US education system has long been a topic of discussion, little research exists that allows immigrant and refugee students to give voice to their experiences of schooling in the United States (Drake, 2016, p. 20). Scholars have thus identified a disconnection between policy approaches to refugee integration and refugees' actual experiences of inclusion (e.g., Eijberts & Ghorashi, 2017). According to Lundberg (2020), in their efforts to provide "equality of opportunity," schools tend to implement a universal, power-blind approach to educating newly arrived students, which prioritizes academic achievement and language proficiency over socio-emotional wellness, friendships, and holistic supports—all while stressing personal responsibility and eliding structural factors that hinder student inclusion. In one of the few research studies exploring SIFE in US schools, Potochnick (2018) emphasizes that students with interrupted schooling are academically capable, but distinct from their immigrant peers, and thus require different educational supports (Potochnick, 2018, p. 884). Yet, US schools do not often recognize the prevalence of SIFE or have structures in place to better serve them (Colón, 2019). Recognizing the distinct needs of SIFE and the fact that social integration is not an individual responsibility but a social and collaborative process that requires "the affordances of social and structural provisions at the meso-level of organization in schooling" (Lundberg, 2020, p. 11), the PSRO developed a model of education advocacy to holistically support SIFE in San Diego.

4.2. PSRO Background

As home to one of the US's largest refugee communities and one of the nation's largest public-school districts, San Diego provides a rich site in which to interrogate the as-yet understudied collective potential of refugee parents as educational advocates. Formed in 2012, the PSRO is a refugee- and immigrant-led community coalition comprising more than twelve language groups advocating for healthy students, supportive schools, and educational equity in the neighborhood of City Heights—a home to significant refugee and immigrant communities in San Diego. Taking cultural humility as the foundation of their advocacy, the PSRO seeks to forge an intentional collective that recognizes and draws upon members' distinct experiences, differences, and identities, while empowering them to work together as educational advocates. As well, cultural humility enables an approach to institutional engagement that seeks to build understanding and inclusivity of diverse voices across power structures. In practice, the PSRO's approach to advocacy is structured around smaller language-based meetings, alongside larger group gatherings and interactions (supported by translators and interpreters) at school and district sites. By bringing individual and embedded (community) narratives together to identify shared concerns, and collectively seeking solutions with educators and decision-makers through a process of mutual empowerment, the PSRO forms a powerful structure for strengthening the connection between policy frameworks, the school system, and the lived experiences of refugees.

4.3. Education Advocacy for Students With Interrupted Formal Education

For almost a decade (2008–2016), newcomer students—an umbrella term that includes categories of immigrants born outside of the US, including asylees, English learners, refugees, SIFE, and unaccompanied youth (US Department of Education, 2016/2017, p. 3)—spent their first year in a class with others like them in what the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) called New Arrival Centers (NACs). In practice, all students under 18 who arrived in SDUSD with some form of interrupted formal education (including lack of transcripts) were considered NAC-eligible, and could remain in NACs for at least one year before transitioning to mainstream grade-level academic classes or until they were reclassified—a process whereby a student is reclassified from English learner status to English proficient status (California Department of Education, n.d.). While it is difficult to get an accurate count on the number of refugee students within SDUSD (since the district does not track this population specifically), in 2017, the PSRO estimated that there were between 2,000 and 3,000 refugee students attending City Heights schools, with 400 to 600 new refugee students arriving each year (PSRO, 2017). Within the NAC, students stayed with the same teacher for the majority of their day, learning English and core subjects like math, science, and history in self-contained classrooms, then joined other students for classes such as physical education and art. Parents were welcome to visit the NAC to meet their children's teachers, ask questions concerning education, and connect with other families. In this way, the NAC provided a supportive space for refugee students and their parents to cultivate community and feel included in the education system. But in the 2016–2017 school year, SDUSD abruptly restructured its approach to educating NAC students, placing them immediately into mainstream classrooms to learn math, science, and other core subjects alongside fluent English-speaking students. According to the district's office of language acquisition, the new program would accelerate the students' English language acquisition, provide equal access to the curriculum, and more quickly integrate newcomer students into the education system (Morrissey, 2016), thus reflecting a "good intentions" approach, in which equality is equated with sameness.

As the PSRO presented these changes to the community, parents, students, and NAC teachers expressed concern that abruptly dismantling the NAC would result in less social support for refugee students and their families, particularly students who were classified as SIFE—"students in grades four through twelve who have experienced disruptions in their educations in their native countries and/or the United States, and/or are unfamiliar with the culture of schooling" (US Department of Education, 2016/2017, p. 3)—the majority of whom were refugees (PSRO SIFE Committee, 2017). In response, the PSRO called for the district to "take a step back" and partner with them to study how best to educate these students. Specifically, the PSRO advocated that the district establish a vertical line of support—from elementary to middle to high school (consisting of teachers, support teachers, and intervention counselors)—as well as a platform for parents and other community members to identify issues, advance recommendations, and engage in reflection with decision-makers. Through this advocacy, a district-wide SIFE Committee (backed by the San Diego Unified School Board) and (a now annual) Community Dialogue on Education were established, both hosted by the PSRO, with a joint aim of developing a model of accountability and communication between the community and the district so that what happened to the NAC—the dismantling of a service for refugees without community consultation—would not happen again.

To elaborate on this structure, we reflect on the first Community Dialogue on Education, which was organized in response to the dismantling of the NAC, but also in response to ongoing education concerns the PSRO had been raising with the district. On the morning of Saturday, March 25th, 2017, more than 130 parents, students, and community members from City Heights schools gathered to hold a Community Dialogue on Education. The intent of the day was to identify themes and develop recommendations expressing what the community saw as important and wanted to see reflected in the district's efforts in the coming year. After a presentation of data on City Heights schools, the Dialogue participants spent time reflecting, and then, in small groups, responded to two questions: As parents, students, and educators, what can be done to address disparities in City Heights schools? Given the solutions you have identified, what focused, specific, actionable effort should the district take next year? The plan was for members of the district's administration to interact with parents and join in their conversation as they discussed the questions. However, with the exception of two school board members and staff from the district's family and community engagement department, no one from SDUSD administration or any principal from a City Heights school attended. Their lack of attendance was interpreted as showing a lack of concern for the community, with one group commenting: "[The lack of attendance from SDUSD and principals] shows that they don't care about us, or our community, also our students' education." During the Dialogue, parents expressed little trust in the decision-making processes of the district and interpreted the district's interactions with them as disrespectful. They felt that the district ignored their input on how policies and practices impacted their children, failed to recognize them as a community with a distinct set of needs, and viewed students and families in a pejorative way. Parents also expressed feeling left out of school activities and ill-informed about their children's academic progress. The students in attendance conveyed that the schools did not encourage them enough because they did not expect them to succeed. The low expectations were seen as rooted in the stereotype that, as refugees and immigrants, they did not value education and, therefore, did not require the same level of investment as made in other students. These feelings of being ignored or left out of important conversations were exemplified by the community's frustration with the way in which the NAC was dismantled—without the inclusion of community voices in a decision-making process that directly impacted them. The community expressed frustration with always being asked to react to district policies rather than being invited to help create the policies. Parents interpreted the district's failure to draw upon parents' knowledge of, and experiences with, their children as a sign that the district did not value their knowledge.

Five years later, the efforts of the PSRO to develop an engagement process that empowers and connects community voices to policy frameworks are reflected in the first cohort of community schools within SDUSD, which serve students from kindergarten through high school. Community schools are a century-old model of education that integrate the voices of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community partners into the vision and design of a school. Across the United States, they have taken different forms, for example, as neighborhood hubs, providing families with access to health screenings, connecting parents to job-training opportunities, or delivering clothing, food, and furniture (Maier et al., 2017). Although community schools vary in the programs they offer and the ways they operate, all share four common pillars: integrated student supports; expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities; family and community engagement; and collaborative leadership and practices (Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2018). As part of a community schools coalition, which includes teachers who opposed the dismantling of the NAC, the PSRO facilitates an engagement process, with continuous student and parent representation, aimed at introducing and embedding community schools in San Diego. Departing from the persistent deficit positioning of refugee parents' interactions with US schools, the PSRO champions a community schools model where families and school authorities position refugee parents as collaborators, educators (Koyama & Bakuza, 2017, p. 329; Shufflebarger Snell, 2018), and experts in their children's lives (Isik-Ercan, 2018, p. 2). Structurally, community schools offer a holistic approach to education, however, in order for them to be effective, wraparound services, student supports, and (community) partnerships (e.g., translation, counseling, afterschool programs, tutoring) must be intentionally identified, expanded, and scaled up to meet the distinct needs of the community in which the school is embedded. In other words, no two community schools should look exactly the same, and ongoing, collaborative community engagement is vital to preventing a superficial implementation that looks good on paper but does little to improve schooling in practice. In the case of SDUSD, the PSRO advocated introducing community schools incrementally, as opposed to all at once, since proceeding cohort by cohort allows for more intentional community consultation that is neighborhood-specific, and cumulatively, contributes to system-wide change. Following this approach, the PSRO contributes to transforming San Diego Unified schools into community schools over the next few years, until the community schools model is reflected district-wide, and the educational trajectories of all students within SDUSD take place in community schools. Throughout this transition, the design, development, implementation, and continuous evaluative process will be overseen by the Community Schools Advisory Committee, a shared decision-making body, which meets monthly, and is composed of community members committed to public education and building schools that serve the needs of the community (Center on Policy Initiatives, 2022).

Given the importance of community consultation, it is thus necessary to emphasize that community schools alone do not engender systemic change. Rather, it is through ongoing dialogue and collaboration between school administrators, teachers, students, and their families that transformations are enacted, assessed, and sustained. The PSRO thus recognizes the establishment of community schools as a compromise—one which allows the school district to respond to the PSRO's call for change without developing targeted supports tailored to refugee students specifically. At the same time, by embedding their advocacy in the concept of cultural humility, the PSRO acknowledges that the district's ability to act is limited, often by funding constraints (Vázquez Baur, 2022), and engages the district as a collaborator rather than as an adversary. Cultural humility thus enables refugee student, parent, and family representation in the spaces where the decisions to shape community schools are made. By providing a platform for community members to hold the district accountable—while recognizing the ways in which existing policies and practices limit institutional decision-makers' capacities for action, and then working with those decision-makers to collectively seek solutions—the PSRO innovates the mechanisms for effecting systemic change by modeling an engagement process based upon humility and mutual empowerment.

5. Critical Refugee Studies Collective: The Refugee Teaching Institute

5.1. Curriculum Inclusion for Refugee Students

Our second case study analyzes the RTI in Merced, organized by the CRSC, whose goal is to create and implement refugee-centered curricula. Given that US school curricula are mostly normed to white, middle-class, English-speaking students, the majority of refugee students attend schools where their academic needs and social realities are not reflected in core content (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017; Li, 2018). Teachers who wish to incorporate students' perspectives into the curriculum often encounter structural and institutional constraints, including the hierarchical nature of school decision-making, the imposition of standardized tests that constrain creativity and criticality in the classroom, the lack of resources to assist students and families, and the lack of time and will for ongoing and sustained opportunities for professional dialogue and development (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011, p. 214). The research on curriculum support for refugee students thus largely elides structural forces and frames students in terms of a deficit, characterizing them in relation to the skills and knowledge they lack upon entering US schools (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 119). In particular, US schools tend to approach curriculum development with an "assimilative, ends-means approach" that treats English language instruction as a mechanism for integrating language learners into a normative US context (Auerbach, 1992, p. 30). At best, this deficit framing urges teachers to be "interculturally sensitive" to "culturally diverse" refugee students to increase their chance to receive an equitable education and to bring "their uprooted lives back to normality" (Strekalova-Hughes, 2017, pp. 562–563). Although this "celebrating diversity" approach encourages teachers to be more responsive to refugee youth, it tends to reinforce teachers' focus on a static notion of culture, while leaving the existing curriculum largely intact and inaccessible to most refugee students. In contrast, the RTI advocates for curricular innovations that build on students' prior knowledge and promote collaboration with refugees' families and communities.

5.2. Critical Refugee Studies Collective

Founded in 2015 as a research group at the University of California Humanities Research Institute, and subsequently funded by a four-year grant from the University of California Office of the President in 2016, the CRSC is a group of interdisciplinary scholars who advocate for and envision a world where all refugees are treated and embraced as fellow human beings with all fundamental rights and privileges. CRSC advances that *refugee* rights, defined as having access to appropriate shelter and food and being able to lead a life of dignity, are *human* rights. Along with this, CSRC posits that refugees carry with them the power of their imaginations as they settle and resettle in lands not their own. Collective members not only study refugees, but many are also refugees themselves with long and deep ties to refugee communities in California and beyond. Committed to community-engaged scholarship, the Collective charts and builds the field of critical refugee studies by centering refugee lives—and the creative and critical potentiality that such lives offer. Through expanded efforts, CRSC grew to integrate a broader converge of not only scholars but also artists, community organizers, students, and teachers. Through the efforts of the CRSC, manifestations of critical refugee studies work have been diverse. They include numerous community events, multiple academic conferences, a book series in partnership with the University of California Press, an innovative and interactive website (https://criticalrefugeestudies.com), university courses across the curriculum, a grants program, art exhibitions, documentaries, ethnographies, dance performances—and an RTI, the subject of this section.

5.3. Refugee Teaching Institute

Merced is located in the heart of California's Central Valley, a vast agricultural basin that produces twenty-five percent of the nation's food. Since the late 1970s, Merced has resettled large groups of refugees from Southeast Asia, Syria, and Afghanistan, whose presence has largely been maligned in public discourse as a problem for the region—a drain on its social and educational services. Countering this narrative, in July 2022, with funding from the Whiting Foundation, the CRSC hosted the first RTI in partnership with the University of California at Merced. Organized as a four-day professional development course series for local K–12 teachers, the RTI connected local teachers and university educators, but also parents and students, and community members to develop a curriculum focused on teaching refugees, teaching about refugees, and teaching by refugees. The RTI centers refugee stories on understanding Central Valley history, critically juxtaposing refugee histories with local histories of conquest, state violence, and incarceration that have been made largely invisible. All teacher participants earned salary-scale academic credits for their participation through the University of California, Merced, and all refugee participants and other community experts were provided a small honorarium for their time.

Traditional professional developments are typically led by private consultants hired by school districts who employ a "top down antidialogical teacher training" (Kohli et al., 2015). In contrast, during the two-year preparation period that preceded the RTI, CRSC organizers intentionally and meaningfully consulted with teachers and administrators in the Merced school district, eliciting their input on the pressing issues they and their students faced in schools. At the same time, what made RTI unique was the organizers' direct interaction and consultation with refugee families, students, and community organizers—the experts on refugee education—to gather ideas on content and approaches to curriculum development. As such, the RTI exemplifies a refugee teaching approach by enabling ongoing collaboration between researchers, teachers, and communities to embed refugee knowledge into the curriculum.

The RTI enrolled nineteen local elementary, middle, and high school teachers, the majority of whom identified as people of color. The first three days of the series focused on the following themes: refugee and immigrant history in the Central Valley; refugee storytelling and media; and refugee education, activism, and resilience. In each of the RTI workshops, refugee stories and epistemologies anchored interactive presentations by CRSC members as well as parents, community members, student leaders, activists, artists, and poets. As an example, the workshop on refugee storytelling and media showcased creative projects produced by refugee artists and offered suggestions on how to create space for students to access and learn from and with refugee stories. By centering refugees and their stories, the panelists offered the audience a much-needed understanding of the contexts, histories, creativity, and lifeworlds of refugees, elevating them as subjects of history. As one speaker emphasized during her presentation on refugee storytelling, the goal is to move from "refugee representation to refugee reclamation."

On day 3, the RTI featured a student panel and a parent panel, moderated by a Hmong community organizer who also served as a translator for one of the parents. Both the parent and student speakers articulated their experiences and expectations of the school system and spoke with authority about the issues that concerned them. The parent panel was temporarily paused when one of the parents was overcome with emotions, as she recounted the ill-treatment she endured from school authorities when her son, who struggled with mental health issues, racked up unexcused absences. Another parent summed up her uneasy relationship with school authorities: "It's not easy to speak up, especially when there's a power differential. You don't speak the language, know the system. Teachers are the adults." In a context where refugee students and their parents are often represented as a problem for teachers and school administrators, the insistence of students on access to quality education, and the parents' assertion of their rights to information and better communication with school officials emphasize refugee agency and efficacy, foregrounding them as enactors of educational change.

Listening to refugee speakers, interacting with refugee media, stories, and poetry, and participating in curriculum building workshops, the nineteen teacher participants actively engaged refugees' concerns, perspectives, knowledge production, and global imaginings. Throughout the course series, they had ample opportunities for critical self-reflection, discussion with peers, and conversations with panelists that encouraged and challenged them to develop course materials that not only offer refugee students a well-rounded education through the lens of their own knowledge, but also provide *all* students the analytical tools to better understand refugee experiences. As an example, the teachers had an animated discussion on how to integrate refugee lifeworlds into science courses, sharing ideas on incorporating refugees' foodway knowledge and practices into courses in biology, environmental science, and chemistry. On the final day, workshop participants were allocated time to process, collaborate, and consider how to recognize, sustain, and foster refugee knowledges and epistemologies in their teaching.

Creating meaningful refugee-centered curricula is the goal of, as well as a challenge for, the RTI. Given that California now requires ethnic studies—"the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and other identities, focusing on people's lived experiences and perspectives" (California 100, n.d.)—as a high school graduation requirement, the RTI-trained teachers have the opportunity to create a refugee-centered curriculum as part of the ethnic studies curriculum. Research on ethnic studies curriculum indicates that culturally responsive pedagogy (pedagogy that responds to students' cultures and needs), while important, is not sufficient, and that key to the process of curricular change is community-responsive pedagogy that builds curriculum around ongoing engagement with students, their parents, and the wider community (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Accordingly, a central component of the RTI vision is to build a firm and organized structure, much like that of the PSRO, for teachers to create and share their curriculum proposals on an ongoing basis with refugee students and their parents for feedback—a process that is already underway. In short, the RTI concludes that meaningful, respectful, and ongoing relationships and conversations with refugees are key for effective and lasting curricular change in refugee education.

6. Conclusion

Challenging the marginalization and misrepresentation of refugee students and their families, this article has shown how refugee parents and community partners in San Diego and Merced, California, have organized collectively to address exclusion within the education system. While previous studies have considered how agents within the school support and integrate refugee students and their families into the education system, we emphasize the agency and efficacy of refugee parents as educational advocates, revealing the multiple ways refugee parents and community partners empower themselves and work collaboratively to effect change within local schools. In the case of the PSRO, educational inclusion is not about integrating students into an existing education system, but rather, about intentionally creating an engagement process that empowers community voices for ongoing participation in decision-making. In the case of the RTI, a refugee teaching approach requires and enables respectful and ongoing collaboration between researchers, teachers, and communities to embed refugee knowledge within curriculum and pedagogy. By elevating the practices and processes of change-making, we have shown how refugee advocates promote their children's success and a more equitable and inclusive learning environment for all students through strengthening school support structures and curricular expansion.

Countering the deficit perspectives that continue to shape scholarly and popular understandings of refugee students, their families, and communities, we recognize refugee parents and students as educators and enactors of educational transformation in their own right. In doing so, we shift the reference point in refugee education from that of school authorities to that of refugees themselves. While there is no surefire approach to effecting systemic change in refugee education, our case studies point to the following set of dynamic principles to deepen social and curricular inclusion in refugee education: move away from deficit views of refugee students; foreground community voice and student, parent, and family empowerment; support an established group engaged in the pursuit of inclusive education; and develop a mutually empowering engagement process that involves all stakeholders within the school and local refugee community. This set of principles is generative in that it recognizes refugees as changemakers, and elevates their subjectivities, knowledge, expertise, and creativity. Recognizing that there are no quick fixes, we have emphasized that systems change is labor-intensive, and requires committed accountability and action from all partners. In order to meaningfully confront the social exclusion of refugee students and their families within the education system, it is thus vital to create and maintain inclusive and community-based engagement processes that are ongoing, intentionally collaborative, and cumulative.

As such, refugee practices and processes are not just for refugees but contribute lessons for advancing epistemic justice and a vision for education that uplifts all of us—not just some of us.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Towards Inclusion: Systemic Change Through Organizational Education

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Abstract

This article discusses inclusion in social work from an organizational perspective and suggests that organizational education (a new discipline and profession focusing on learning organizations) opens up new perspectives for organizing inclusion. In making this argument, the authors start with a notion of social inclusion that is connected to theories of social justice, social exclusion, and democracy. Against the background of historical and recent research on child and youth care in Germany and Switzerland, it is shown how organizations place clients in powerless positions. To this day, diversity in society is viewed as problematic for organizations, particularly when it comes to interpreting clients' situations. However, learning can only take place in organizations if clients have a chance to articulate their experiences with organizations and participate in decision-making from more powerful positions. The authors therefore plea for organizations in social work and other social services to become more democratized, to further a form of inclusion that leads to more social justice.

Keywords

critical diversity management; organizational education; social inclusion; social justice

Issue

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1. Introduction

Social professions such as social work, social pedagogy, community organizing, and more have been established and developed with the aim of furthering social justice in divided capitalist societies and enabling social inclusion (Leiby, 1978; Schreiner & Köngeter, 2020). Even before the invention of these new professions at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, social services were delivered by organizations (such as charity organizations or almshouses). As shown by Andrew Abbott in his historical analysis of social work's development, these organizations are often older than the profession itself (Abbott, 1995). Social work and other social professions began to connect these organizations and interpreted them as an interconnected field of action that followed the ethics, theories, and practices of a profession they called social work (Abbott, 1995, p. 557). However, organizations continue to be social entities with their own aims, structures, ethical considerations, etc., that may conflict with professional considerations (Lipsky, 2010).

For a long time, the importance of organizations and the process of organizing social services were neglected in social work research. An organizational perspective on social work, however, is pivotal to revealing the structures and dynamics on the meso-level leading to social exclusion and inclusion. Social service organizations are not only influenced by processes in society but are themselves major actors translating decisions on the macro-level into action on the meso-level and finally on the micro-level. Social organizations have a duty to interpret and apply legislation and are therefore actively involved in producing a just or unjust society. Some theorists in social work even argue that social work is a profession of justice (Schrödter, 2007; Ziegler et al., 2010). We will argue here that social work organizations are major actors in their own right in achieving or impeding social justice and that their function hinges on the question of how social work clients are included in the organization of social work.

Our theoretical approach to inclusion is informed by the theory of social justice proposed by Young (1990, 2000) and by the theory of social exclusion developed by Good Gingrich (2003, 2016). Young relates inclusion to democratic decision-making processes: "Strong and normatively legitimate democracy…includes all equally in the process that leads to decisions [by] all those who will be affected by them (Young, 2000, p. 11). Young's approach towards inclusion differs from inclusion theories found in education or in the diversity and inclusion debate in organizational theories. It is not related to criteria such as having access to regular institutions, being part of a social group, being valued, getting support, meeting needs, respecting differences, and recognizing diversity (e.g., Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Instead, it says that the degree of inclusion people gain is determined by their chance to make decisions that affect their own life. This move shifts the focus to decisions that are made within organizations. From this perspective, inclusion in organizations requires creating structures and cultures that enable everyone involved in service delivery, including staff and clients, to have a say in the decision-making that affects their lives. This emphasis on the importance of position and decision-making aligns with theoretical deliberations in the discourse on social exclusion: "We define social exclusion as the official procedures and everyday practices that function to draw individuals and groups inside to devalued and dispossessed places, and thus (re)produce, reinforce, and justify economic, spatial, sociopolitical, and subjective divides" (Good Gingrich & Köngeter, 2017, p. 326).

Against the background of historical and recent developments in child and youth service organizations, we will discuss the importance of an organizational perspective on inclusion. In the next chapter, we will highlight the paradox situation of social service organizations, caught between exclusion and inclusion. From there we will turn to organizational education and the opportunity it presents in enabling organizations to become inclusive. As the focus of organizational pedagogy is on learning and culture, we will examine both topics and discuss what role they play in organizations that are, or are becoming, inclusive. To do so, we will examine findings of a case study that explores different interpretations of diversity within a youth welfare office. Finally, we will draw a conclusion and describe how the outlook of organizational pedagogy can contribute to further discussions.

2. Social Work Organizations and Their Ambivalence Towards Inclusion

Social work is a profession that aims to further social change and is based—among other principles—on the principle of social justice: "Social justice is a core value of social work and has remained a central focus of social work's mission and purpose since its establishment" (Watts & Hodgson, 2019, p. 23). First, theories of social justice have the function to provide social work with ethical considerations justifying and navigating social practices in social work. The "social question" of the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century raised the issue of the deep social divide between rich and poor and how to overcome the ongoing social exclusion of parts of the population from the economy, education, politics, etc. Welfare institutions and social professions were established to further the social inclusion of these groups. However, politics of social inclusion often had, and still have, an adverse effect on these groups; their inclusion or the specific form of their inclusion is unfavourable to them (Good Gingrich, 2003; Sen, 2000), e.g., when people are included in the labour market in jobs that threaten their self-development or self-determination, or as demonstrated by the history of Indigenous peoples' inclusion in Western settler societies (Libesman, 2014). Social professions are assigned to organize the facilitation and enforcement of inclusion into different systems of society, sometimes against the will of the people affected by inclusion policies. However, this form of inclusion often contradicts the democratic understanding of inclusion described above. We argue that an understanding of how social work is organized is key to explaining this contradiction and to finding alternative ways of dealing with the task of inclusion.

2.1. Welfare Organizations and Decision-Making

Welfare institutions such as social security services or child protection services are designed to overcome or at least to change the dynamics of social exclusion in a capitalist society. Its organizations are the backbone of these institutions. Ideas and notions of social justice are therefore part of the DNA both of welfare institutions and organizations of social work and other professions. The way welfare is organized, however, not only produces social justice but can also lead to the continuation or even the worsening of social injustice. This can be seen as a fundamental structural dilemma when organizing social professions. To present this argument, we pick up on the theory of social justice that Young (1990) described in her book *Social Justice and the Politics of Difference*. She starts by describing the experiences of injustice articulated in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, e.g., the civil rights movement, the second-wave feminism movement, the LGBTIQ* movement, and many more. Her critical approach to social justice does not search for universal, abstract rules to determine what is just, but starts with concrete experiences of injustice in certain social contexts. She argues that discussions of social justice should be focused less on formal deliberations on universal rules to decide about what is just and more on listening: "Normative reflection arises from hearing a cry of suffering or distress, or feeling distress oneself" (Young, 1990, p. 5). Starting out from this insight, she identifies two types of social injustice: oppression and dominance:

> The values comprised in the good life can be reduced to two very general ones: (1) developing and exercising one's capacities and expressing one's experience, and (2) participating in determining one's action and the conditions of one's action….To these two general values correspond two social conditions that define injustice: oppression, the institutional constraint on self-development, and domination, the institutional constraint on self-determination. (Young, 1990, p. 37)

The two experiences of social injustice, oppression, and dominance, are embedded in social contexts that cannot be denied when we talk about experiences of social justice or injustice. Young's differentiation between five forms of oppression occurring in different social and cultural settings—exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence—are often referred to in the discipline and profession of social work. In the following, however, we will focus on social injustices relating to dominance, to be differentiated from oppression. Although all people who are oppressed are dominated, not all people who are dominated also experience some form of oppression. Young defines domination as "the structural or systemic phenomena which exclude people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions" (Young, 1990, p. 31) and, as shown above, social inclusion in turn requires the chance to participate in making decisions that can determine actions and the conditions behind those actions. Dominance is therefore the result of politics and decision-making within politics, with "politics" defined as "all aspects of institutional organization, public action, social practices and habits, and cultural meanings insofar as they are potentially subject to collective evaluation and decisionmaking" (Young, 1990, p. 35).

The national welfare state, which tames capitalist society in various ways, is the socio-historical context in which these questions of social justice are discussed and translated into practice. The establishment of welfare state institutions and organizations is therefore equiprimordial with political struggles and society's moral reflections about social justice and injustice. The social professions can be seen as a social arena where these political struggles and moral reflections take place vicariously. They develop their codes of ethics, but with reference to the welfare state and its legal regulations, bureaucratic administrations, fiscal restrictions, and much more. Unlike other professions that are considered to be long-established (such as law, medicine, etc.), the new social professions have not developed a form of autonomy comparable with medicine, science, law, etc. Furthermore, social services are delivered predominantly within and by organizations. The concrete social embeddedness of social professions leads social professions and particularly social work to have an ambivalent structure.

Young argues with reference to Offe (1984) that these welfare state organizations are largely de-politicized spheres where rules are established and decisions made without any relation to public discussions; that politics and state institutions are becoming increasingly uncoupled from one another:

> Most public policy decisionmaking takes place as part of the day-to-day operations of these government agencies, which receive with their legislative or executive creation wide powers to formulate and enforce regulations. Most of these policies are hammered out in complex and informal negotiating processes within the agencies and between these agencies. (Young, 1990, p. 73)

This de-politicization of decisions creates a fertile ground for dominance structures to be reproduced in our societies with no opportunity for reflection on the social injustices taking place. This is the reason why so many forms of dominance are not detected or revealed in public: Welfare organizations and institutions are designed to reduce public discourse on the myriad of decisions that must be made. But at the same time, they withdraw these decisions from public discourse.

Dominance structures established by bureaucratic welfare organizations can go hand in hand with cultural imperialism and the neglect of self-determination. Many Indigenous communities have experienced adverse inclusion in the welfare state and its bureaucratic organizations, with devastating effects on their community. Although organizations are one of the major vehicles for pushing through cultural dominance, the basis for this form of oppression lies in Western nation-states denying Indigenous peoples the chance for self-determination (Young, 2000). The Western notion of the nation-state, uniting territory, authority, and right (Sassen, 2008), fails to recognize the diversity and multiplicity of sovereignties within a nation-state (Decat, 2012). Indigenous communities' claim to self-determination challenges the iron cage of the Western welfare systems and their organizations. At the same time, this claim criticizes the politics of inclusion that have led to experiences of dominance and oppression.

2.2. Child Welfare Organizations and Their History of Social Exclusion

The standard account of the establishment and professional history of social work often emphasizes the relationship between social work and social justice. However, the observable practice of social work and the experiences of those who are meant to deliver social services or benefit from them—the service users—paint a different picture. Social work as a profession has excluded both clients and social workers by drawing boundaries and claiming authority over organizations and fields of action in social work. Critical accounts on the historiography of social exclusion by social work and its organizations show that social work continues to tell a story of progress, despite the fact that we continue to identify exclusive practices in social work up to the present time (Chapman & Withers, 2019). Examples of these practices include settler colonialism and imperialism affecting early social reformers (Johnstone, 2016), racial discrimination in the settlement house movement (Lasch-Quinn, 1993), the incarceration of Japanese Americans in the US during World War II (Park, 2019), and the coerced placement of children from vagrant people in Switzerland (Mottier, 2012), among others. Also, the history of child welfare organizations is a history of scandals. For more than 20 years now, the abuse of children placed in childcare organizations in almost all Western countries has been investigated by researchers, journalists, residents, and professionals. The Ryan Report in Ireland was one of the first encompassing studies on the history of childcare services (Commission to Inquire Into Child Abuse, 2009). In the years that followed it, the oppression taking place in these organizations was also investigated in Germany and Switzerland.

Most research has been conducted on the childcare organizations where this kind of abuse took place and less on the organizations that referred children to those places. From an organizational point of view, this differentiation is crucial. As defined by Hasenfeld (1972), the former organizations are people-changing organizations. These organizations are designed to include clients for a longer time to supposedly help them in various ways. As Goffman (1961) showed in his groundbreaking research on total institutions, the structure of these organizations produces the oppression that clients experience there. People-processing organizations, on the other hand, are tasked with classifying clients, making decisions about the subsequent process of supporting clients, and referring them to other organizations which are then supposed to help clients cope with their lives. These organizations' central task is decision-making: deciding about classifications, the types of services used, the organizations delivering the services, etc. The organizations' decision-making is carried out by professionals who make use of their discretionary power (Lipsky, 2010), but who are also tied to decisions contained in the organizations' policies, regulations, legal obligations, etc.

Historical research on the decision-making carried out by people-processing childcare service organizations shows that clients are classified not only by professional categories but also by theories about what is thought to be normal or deviant. Normalization strategies aim to make clients fit society's requirements, which are considered a prerequisite for a worthy life. What is considered to be normal, however, is often rooted in stereotypes about marginalized groups in society and leads to disruptive and harmful decisions. One example is the history of girls in childcare. Categorization as a deviant or neglected girl is related to traditional, bourgeois notions of femininity (Gehltomholt & Hering, 2006). Being placed in care fuelled these girls' stigmatization and had devastating consequences for many of them (Schmidt, 2002). Another example from Switzerland is the systematic, extensive placement in care of children of the Jenische, a vagrant people living in Germany, Austria, France, and Switzerland. In 1926, the still-existing youth agency Pro Juventute established a foundation for the "children of the country road" (*Kinder der Landstrasse*). In the period leading up to 1972, over 600 children were placed in care, often against the will of their parents, as the life of travellers was thought to endanger these children.

These two examples of historical research on young people and their families being dominated by childcare organizations reveal the pivotal importance of the classification processes used by people-processing organizations. As Adrienne Chambon noted in a review of historical accounts:

> At this point, we can say that two strands of social work were tightly woven into the texture of the profession. On the one hand, striving towards greater collectivity, integration, we-ness, with social work intervention as a facilitator or mediator…and on the other, a distance between the knower and the known, the professional (Self) and the client (Other), on the basis of professional and academic knowledge. (Chambon, 2013, p. 122)

Both strands can be identified in the points made above. A lack of recognition of diversity in society and the idea of bringing together social groups in the name of social justice go hand in hand. It is the lack of participation in decision-making found in people-processing organizations that forms the basis for practices of social injustice despite the intention of furthering social justice. Developments in social professions, their advanced discourse on social justice, and their theories and models for processing clients are often not placed in the context of and related to modern welfare administration, institutions, and organizations, which all still act as an iron cage. The question we would like to raise here is how social professions can be enabled to reflect, reveal, and reform their organizational practices that so profoundly shape professional decision-making. From our point of view, organizational education is an important entry point to this discussion. It asks whether and how clients, client groups, and the public can be included in the administration of the welfare state and related organizations involved in social welfare and social work.

3. Organizational Education as a Way of Organizing Inclusion

Organizational education is a subdiscipline within educational science and an emerging profession that furthers learning within and between organizations, and the education of organizations. Organizational education puts organizations at the centre of social and educational professions and does not just discuss organization as one of many contextual factors influencing the delivery of social or educational services (Engel & Göhlich, 2022, p. 12). Instead, it argues that organizing and delivering social services coincide, and organizations are therefore part and parcel of social and educational services.

The nature of social services affects the way they are organized. Social services can only be delivered in cooperation with their clients. Whether people are processed and changed depends on the clients who coproduce the service—or the service delivery fails. Therefore, the process of service delivery and whether clients have a say in organizing social services are of great interest to organizational education: "In accordance with the epistemological approach to education, organizational education looks not only at the structural constitution of organizations, but also at their processual and cultural aspects" (Göhlich et al., 2018, p. 208).

Organizational education specifically deals with questions about organizational learning. We can differentiate between learning in organizations, by organizations, and between organizations. Learning *in* organizations focuses on learning by individual or collective actors that are members of organizations, or other related actors. This is related to learning *by* organizations (Göhlich et al., 2018, p. 207); these two fields can only be differentiated analytically. Organizations in the field of social services are particularly highly interconnected, as described in the section on people-processing and people-changing organizations. Therefore, learning by organizations is often related to learning *between* organizations. From this educational perspective, organizations are not only actors in learning processes but also outcomes of such processes.

Learning is the central process that leads to the establishment of organizational identity and culture. Theories of organizational culture (Schein, 1990) are often used to research and explain differences in the way social service organizations perceive their social environment, organize their professional work, collaborate with their clients, etc. (Cloos, 2007; Klatetzki, 1993). Organizational culture can be defined as those parts of an organization that are not decided upon, but shape its members' expectations about how to act. It can be seen as a fertile source of ideas within organizations, not determining what is done in those organizations, and how, but exerting an influence thereon (Kühl, 2018).

Learning and culture are interrelated, as Fahrenwald (2011) pointed out in her study on narrating as a central practice of learning. Stories are a crucial medium of learning in organizations. They are a traditional and still often-used way of ensuring that members of organizations know how the world should be perceived, understand the nature of things, and realise how things should be done. Stories are also a means of remembering what is important. They are an integral part of the memory of organizations. But not all stories are considered to be an integral part of an organization's identity. Pro Juventute, for example, is responsible for breaking up families among vagrant people in Switzerland, yet emphasizes its long-standing commitment to supporting children, young people, and their families on its website. Although there has been some form of reappraisal of this dark episode in their history, there is little sign of their examining their past in their public appearance.

As described above, social work and its organizations are arenas of social contestation and debate. Against this background, it is important to organize memory work. Social service organizations are archives of these conflicts, and learning what to do and how to do it in social work is as important as learning what not to do and how not to do it. Initiating a learning culture is therefore important for the development of responsible and accountable social service organizations. This is even more true when organizations have oppressed and dominated minority groups in the name of Western welfare states, such as the cultural genocide of vagrant people in Switzerland or settler colonial states and their Indigenous communities. A learning culture needs to be implemented both in the organizations that were involved in this wrongdoing and in civil societies.

Its focus on learning is not the only way in which organizational education differs from other academic disciplines dealing with organizations, such as organizational psychology or organizational sociology. Educational science always involves normative reflection on learning and discusses ethics within education. This is also true of organizational education. Engel and Göhlich (2022) argue that ethical considerations are especially vital in organizational education, given the significant power held by organizations and the potential for their actions to cause harm to the individuals they serve. "They produce structures, discourses and practices that discriminate against people, make people's working and learning environments neoliberal in terms of the use of human resources, and create unequal conditions for potential access to education, learning and knowledge production" (Engel & Göhlich, 2022, p. 13, translated by the authors). As shown in historical research on organizations in modern society, bureaucratic organizations, in particular, tend to suppress moral deliberation and remove their members' personal responsibility (Ortmann, 2020).

It is therefore important to understand processes of organizing social services as a means not only of managing such services efficiently but also of developing an "educational way of organizing." The educational approach searches for a new way of creating organizations that "becomes a heterotopia; a counter-site on which to pin hopes of a different practice of organization and the social sphere" (Weber, 2020, p. 358, translated by the authors). This search seems to be necessary for organizations to find ways of becoming inclusive. The trivial assertion that organizations can be inclusive or exclusive is especially important for social service organizations since these organizations often claim in public to generate inclusion whereas they produce exclusion. It leads to the question of how the people that are affected by organizations and their decisions can participate in decision-making. Or, to put it in the words of Iris Marion Young, the question of how to democratize social service organizations. This process of democratization needs to take into account people's right to self-determination, a fact that could ultimately lead to the pluralisation of welfare systems within a diverse national welfare state (Libesman, 2014).

The approach of organizational education takes a critical stance towards this long-standing tradition in social professions that focuses on the further development of professional practices and argues that systemic change can only occur if social service organizations and their organizational culture change. Inclusion, therefore, becomes an integral part of all aspects of organizing social services, with a specific focus on the cultural dimension of organizations. This approach means re-imagining the way clients are perceived and re-positioning clients in the decision-making processes used by social service organizations.

4. Critical Management of Diversity and Inclusion: A Case Example

Organizations classify people by social categories such as class, race, gender, sexual orientation and identity, age, lifestyle, etc., as shown above in the description of historical research on child and youth care services. From an anti-essentialist viewpoint, these categorization processes are rooted not only in professional traditions but also in organizational culture and its societal environment. Since categorizing is constitutive to all social professions, the aim cannot be to avoid categorizing, but to organize reflection on how categorizing takes place and to organize clients' opportunities to participate in categorization processes that affect them. We will sketch out an example from a recent study to show exactly how we address reflection on culture and structure in the context of learning.

In an organizational case study on diversity within a youth welfare service (Jugendamt, a typical people-processing organization within the child and youth welfare system), Schreiner (2021) analysed what diversity meant for the delivery of services. Using grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the study focused on the organizational culture and the professionals' interpretations of diversity. The staff were considered experts on their organization and its cultural practices, with explicit knowledge about policies and practices within the organization. Parts of the interview guide focused on this explicit knowledge as suggested in the methodology of expert interviews (Gläser & Laudel, 2010). These parts were complemented by narrative prompts as in problem-centred interviews (Witzel, 2000) to also gather implicit knowledge of the organizational culture. Altogether, fourteen interviews were conducted from different departments and hierarchy levels, which led to a saturation of the different interpretations of diversity in this organization.

Schreiner (2021) finds that in this organization, diversity is interpreted differently depending on the group the interviewees are talking about: staff or clients. For example, clients having a "migration background" (*Migrationshintergrund*, a term for all clients who migrated or whose parents migrated to Germany) is described as a challenge for their organization. Among other things, they argue that clients lack cultural knowledge and have lower language skills (Schreiner, 2021, pp. 128–130). When it comes to staff's "migration background," however, this category is related to specific competencies, special cultural knowledge, and language skills (Schreiner, 2021, pp. 132–133). This ambivalent interpretation of diversity within this social service organization is pervasive: On the one hand, diversity is used to construct a social problem among clients; on the other hand, it is seen as a resource for the organization as it promises to solve the problem that clients create.

There are multiple reasons to examine organizational structure, contexts, and culture as factors affecting their learned behaviours. In the youth welfare office studied here, as in other social service organizations, social services are provided based on a legally accepted social diagnosis or recognized social problem. Otherwise, social services cannot be granted to a client or group of clients (Schreiner, 2021, p. 128). The problematization of clients is therefore necessary for the funding of social service organizations. They learn to focus on social problems to sustain existing social services and to create new services for (potential) clients. However, within the staff, diversity is seen in exactly the opposite light: the same categories are primarily seen as a resource (Schreiner, 2021, pp. 146–148). This is not only due to solidarity among colleagues: diversity is seen as a feature that helps to fulfil the organizational purpose (Schreiner, 2021, p. 147). The category "migration background" has a double purpose. It creates the need to treat this population differently, and to do so there is a need for staff that fit the social problem that is created. In the end, the organizations can argue that they offer the best support and provide the best organizational outcome. The organization consequently learns to make use of the diversity in society to produce problems and directly offer a fitting solution. The contrast to the historical findings is striking: social service organizations no longer aim to make clients fit a notion of a normal population. Instead, diversity leads to specialization within social services (i.e., creating specific organizations and/or departments within organizations) to meet the needs of client groups. Accordingly, staff are also specialized in certain client groups. The problematization of clients, however, continues with no effort being made to ensure that clients are not only affected by social service organizations' decisions but can also participate in them.

This example raises the question of how to address learning processes affecting organizational culture. For us, the central questions are: Who is involved in organizing social services? How can the people who are processed by organizations (see Hasenfeld, 1972) have a say in how that organizing takes place? In the study described above, no one questioned the fact that only staff were considered to be members of the organization. This very common perspective on organizations is mirrored in most approaches to learning in organizations and organizational change. Moreover, diversity management mostly focuses on staff members. The difference between staff and clients, however, is the most important categorial difference that shapes all categorization processes in social work. Our argument here is that this difference, and the way this difference is processed in organizations, are central to the question of whether social service organizations further social justice and inclusion. The only way to democratize social services and by doing so to further inclusion in social work is to change the way this difference is processed in social service organizations.

We would like to suggest that, especially in the case of social service organizations that co-create their services with the clients, it is essential to create new forms for clients' participation in organizational processes. Based on this proposition, we need to think differently about the borders of social service organizations and the status of the different groups. All the people involved must be seen as part of organizational processes (with different statuses and roles). It is only then that diversity in society can be perceived as a starting point for joint learning experiences. As long as client/staff matching is the only way of dealing with the diversity that exists in society, learning, and inclusion will be prevented. There is a need to switch from the perspective of a resource-matching problem to a logic of learning from differences and including diverse groups in decision-making and processes of working together.

5. Conclusion

Based on the assumption that social work and social welfare systems are created to further social justice and inclusion, we explored the effect of organizing social services. Against the background of the theory of social justice developed by Iris Marion Young, we developed the argument that organizing social work leads to client groups' exclusion from decision-making and ultimately to a lack of the self-determination that is supposed to be at the centre of ethical deliberations in the social professions, and particularly in social work. The history of social exclusion through social work suggests that both people-processing and people changing-organizations are characterized by a paradox. On the one hand, it is their task and proclaimed goal to further social justice and clients' inclusion, but on the other hand, they reproduce or generate exclusion. From the perspective of organizational education, we suggest that diversity and inclusion must be seen in social work against the background of the most important difference that overshadows all other differences in social service organizations: the difference between clients and staff. If inclusion means bringing all groups into positions where they can participate in decisions that affect them, then this difference and the resulting power differentials need to be addressed when organizing diversity in social service organizations. This does not mean neglecting the diversity found in society. It means instead understanding how differences between staff and clients, and the resulting power differentials, are related to the diversity and the categorization of diversity found in society. In the case of marginalized groups or Indigenous communities in settler colonial states, this power differential can be aggravated by these people being denied self-determination.

To achieve an understanding of differences and establish politics of difference, the perspective of organizational education is crucial as it opens up new ways of dealing with organizations. We argue that social service organizations develop organizational cultures that emerge through learning processes in, by, and between organizations. To change organizational cultures (and cultures of welfare systems), we have to enable learning processes. Following this line of argument, inclusion is not only something that requires the management of resources in organizations. Instead, inclusion must become part of the organizational culture and therefore an integral part of organizations.

There are two temporal perspectives that go hand in hand. On the one hand, an organization's culture is shaped by the way its history and memory are perceived and transmitted. Memory work such as telling stories or creating living archives in which documents, artefacts, pictures, etc., are made accessible, is important for organizational culture. On the other hand, it is important to analyse and understand the ways in which organizations learn and how this results in organizational knowledge that can be used to produce creativity and innovation. Again, the range of perspectives found in organizations is of crucial importance in organizational learning: Who is part of the organization? How do the different groups have access to the learning process? How do social service organizations deal with the groups' different perspectives? How do clients and staff with diverse backgrounds have the chance to influence the decisions that organizations make? We argue that the traditional approach of seeing staff members as part of social service organizations and clients as their environment is lacking. It hinders learning from diversity and prevents social service organizations from becoming inclusive and furthering social justice. Clients must be considered part of an organizational learning process, particularly in social service organizations where the way clients are classified is often related to stereotypes. As long as this is understood as individual cases of professional malpractice rather than a systemic issue, organizational dynamics can still unfold their devastating consequences.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Inclusive Policy? An Intersectional Analysis of Policy Influencing Women's Reproductive Decision-Making

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Abstract

Policy can be used and experienced as a tool for social inclusion or exclusion; it can empower or disenfranchise. Women's reproductive decision-making and health is impacted by policy, and women's experiences of diverse and intersecting marginalised social locations can influence their experiences of policy. This research aimed to explore how intersectionality is considered within Victorian state government policies that influence and impact women's reproductive decision-making. A systematic search of Victorian (Australia) government policy instruments was undertaken, identifying twenty policy instruments. Policies were analysed using an intersectional policy analysis framework using a two-stage process involving deductive coding into the domains of the framework, followed by inductive thematic analysis within and across domains. Findings reveal inconsistencies within and across policies in how they consider intersecting social relations of power in the representation of problems, women's positionings, policy impacts, and policy solutions. These gaps could exclude and marginalise individuals and groups and contribute to systemic inequities in women's reproductive decision-making and the outcomes of those decisions, particularly among already marginalised groups. The lack of women's voices in policy further excludes and marginalises those impacted by the policy and limits the representation of all women in policy. Policy development needs to meaningfully involve women with diverse and intersecting marginalised social locations, and critical reflexivity of all stakeholders, to ensure policies can better account for the experiences of, and impacts upon, women who are marginalised and effect change to promote social inclusion and equity in women's reproductive decision-making.

Keywords
intersectionality; policy analysis; reproductive decision-making; social inclusion; women

Issue
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1. Introduction

Social exclusion is a multidimensional (political, economic, social, and cultural) process interacting with micro, meso, and macro levels of society. It is both driven by and reinforcing of unequal power relationships, manifesting in inequities in the extent and quality of individuals' and groups' resources and opportunities for participating in society (Levitas et al., 2007; Popay et al., 2008). Women can experience social inclusion or exclusion in the process of, and as an outcome of, their reproductive decision-making (Graham et al., 2020). The policy environment, including policies addressing micro, meso, and macro issues, can influence women's reproductive decision-making (WRDM; Graham et al., 2016, 2022), but little is understood about how those policies consider and accommodate women's experiences of intersecting social locations of marginalisation which may impact their reproductive decision making. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) examines how factors such race, class and gender interact to produce multiple states of oppression (Gopaldas, 2013). This lens enables exploration of structural and societal factors that create and perpetuate oppressive social power relationships, and individuals' subjective experiences of those oppressions. As such, the aim of this research is to explore how intersectionality is considered within Victorian state government policies that influence and impact WRDM.

WRDM and health are complex and multifaceted domains, and impacted by intersecting factors at the micro (individual, family, and social), meso (community and services), and macro (societal and structural) levels, which can enhance and/or restrict the extent and quality of women's resources and opportunities to, or not to, participate in reproduction and parenting in preferred ways. This includes self-determining whether and when to have biological or adopted children, the number and spacing of children, and whether to use fertility control, assisted reproduction technology, or pregnancy termination in support of their decisions (Graham et al., 2016, 2018, 2022; Redshaw & Martin, 2011). Inequitable resources and participation across these levels can constitute social exclusion driven by unequal relations of gender, sexuality, class, race, age, and ability. Middle-classed, white, heterosexual, cisgender, married women are constructed interactively by society and through policy as good and desirable procreators and mothers who are enabled, encouraged, and obliged to access resources that enable conformity with pronatalist norms. Conversely, low-income, Indigenous, non-white, queer, single, adolescent, older, and disabled women are constructed as undesirable procreators and mothers who are discouraged or excluded from becoming mothers and experience barriers to accessing the resources and opportunities that would enhance their reproductive health and decision-making (Elliott, 2017; Graham et al., 2016, 2018; Hayman & Wilkes, 2017; Morison & Herbert, 2019; Turnbull et al., 2020).

At the micro level, research suggests women make reproductive decisions in the context of their everyday lives, which are unique and constituted by individual and contextual interactions of circumstances and experiences (Graham et al., 2018). These include women's economic, educational, employment, housing and geographic circumstances, marital status, social support, age, physical and mental health conditions, and reproductive and sexual health knowledge, skills, service use, intentions, beliefs, desires, preferences, and identities. These circumstances and experiences are positioned within social, historical, cultural, religious, and political contexts in families, relationships, communities, services, and societies (Botfield et al., 2015, 2016; Graham et al., 2022; Hawkey et al., 2018; Kirkman et al., 2010; Metusela et al., 2017; Rich et al., 2021; Robards et al., 2019). For example, policies that make reproductive technologies available, but fail to ensure they are affordable, can inhibit low-income women from making decisions to access high-cost assisted reproductive technologies or pregnancy terminations (Graham et al., 2016; Sifris & Belton, 2017; Soucie et al., 2022).

At the meso level, medical and reproductive health professionals' positions of power and authority can influence WRDM and the consequences of their decision. Professionals' knowledge, prejudices, moral, religious, and cultural beliefs, gatekeeping, and dismissal of women's experiences regarding sexual and reproductive health and women's socially constructed identities, can influence women's experiences of access to information and reproductive services and technologies, including the affordability, acceptability, appropriateness, and confidentiality of information and services (as governed by policy positions). This in turn can influence women's reproductive decisions (Botfield et al., 2015, 2016; Carter et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2022; Kapilashrami, 2020; Rich et al., 2021; Sifris, 2016; Soucie et al., 2022). For example, women who live in rural areas with limited services and providers, who are younger, and/or identify as sexually or gender-diverse, and/or from minority cultural or religious backgrounds can experience barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services and technologies (Campbell, 2020; Quinn et al., 2021; Robards et al., 2019; Sifris & Belton, 2017; Soucie et al., 2022; Ussher et al., 2012).

At the macro-level, the policy environment is a key influence on women's access to and quality of resources and opportunities for participation, which can influence meso and micro-level contexts surrounding WRDM and health (Graham et al., 2016, 2018, 2022; Rich et al., 2021). Previous research suggests inequitable policy environments can directly constrain WRDM (Rich et al., 2021) by creating unequal access to reproductive rights and resources; for example, excluding single and lesbian women from assisted reproductive technologies (Agénor et al., 2021), and depriving women with disabilities of choice through involuntary sterilisation (Elliott, 2017; Sifris, 2016). Similarly, policies purporting to support groups with intersecting experiences of marginalisation by focusing on, regulating the decisions of, and restricting the autonomy of, at-risk or devalued groups (such as younger, older, Indigenous, disabled, and low-income women) can instead entrench stigmatisation, inequitable access to services and technologies, and social exclusion (Elliott, 2017; Graham et al., 2016, 2018; Morison & Herbert, 2019).

Despite the evidence about intersecting influences on WRDM, and the role of policy influencing WRDM, there is an absence of understanding of policy influencing WRDM through an intersectional lens. The research builds on previous work mapping federal and state/territory policy instruments that govern women's reproductive choices (Graham et al., 2016), analysis of the Australian policy context relating to women's reproductive choices (Graham et al., 2018), and women's lived experience of policy which influenced their reproductive decision-making (Graham et al., 2022). The current research extends on this work by bringing a focus to

Victorian policy and the representation of intersectionality in policy.

2. Methods

A search of Victorian (Australia) policy instruments was undertaken to identify the number and scope of policies governing WRDM. In Australia, the federal policy environment governs the context for policy at the state and territory levels. Victorian state policies were the exclusive focus of this research in order to maintain a manageable data set within the limited scope and practical context of the research. Victoria was specifically chosen because it is the state within which the researchers live and work and therefore have greater knowledge of the context. Further, no research to date has looked specifically at WRMD and intersectionality in the Victorian context.

For this research, a "policy" includes instruments across the four categories of Hood's (1983) typology of policy instruments: nodality instruments which seek to influence behaviour through education and information, including advisory and advocacy instruments (see, for example, Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2008); treasure instruments which use fiscal means to influence and regulate private organisations and the public (for example, the 1965 Maintenance Act); organisation instruments which govern actions and services delivered by government agencies (see, for example, Department of Health and Human Services, 2017); and authority instruments such as parliamentary Acts which are legislative instruments designed to enact new or amended law. It is possible for instruments to be considered as multiple types; for example, the 1965 Maintenance Act is both a treasure instrument and an authority instrument.

A systematic search was undertaken of Victorian government websites including, but not limited to, the Australian Government ComLaw, state parliamentary sites, the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and the Department of Social Services. Search terms used were:

> Abortion/termination, act, adoption, adoption rights, agenda, assisted reproductive technologies, bills, child support, child care, cloning, discrimination, equal opportunity, family, family planning, family tax benefit, federal, fertility/infertility, framework, gender, government, health, IVF, legislation, mother, parent, parental leave, parental policy, parenting payment, policy, pregnancy, regulation/s, reproduction, reproductive health, sexual health, social security, strategy, surrogacy, woman/en/female

Policy instruments were included if they influenced WRDM, such as economic support and service provision, were current at the time of the search, and applied to Victoria. Policies were excluded if they related to aspects of reproductive health not specific to decision-making, such as if they affect aspects deemed as post-decision-making. For example, the 2015 Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment "No Jab No Play" Act was identified during the search strategy but was excluded from the data set as it is specific to children and increasing their immunisation rates, which is beyond the reproductive decision-making process. An initial search identified 25 policy instruments; eight were removed as they did not fit the inclusion criteria. An additional three policies were identified through a hand search. This resulted in 20 policies included in the data set (Table 1). There were 15 legislative instruments; 13 Acts (laws that had been passed) and two regulations (delegations of legislation to operationalise the Acts). One instrument was a Bill (a proposed law introduced to parliament but not yet passed). The remaining four policies were non-legally binding instruments (one report, one strategy, one statement and one key priorities document).

In the absence of existing frameworks that encompass gender, intersectionality and women's reproductive health, an intersectional policy analysis framework was developed by the research team to analyse policy impacting women's reproductive decision-making. The framework drew upon the Bacchi (2009, pp. 25–53), Hankivsky et al. (2012), Keleher (2013), and Manning (2014) frameworks. These frameworks contributed to the development of an intersectional policy analysis, whereby intersectionality-informed analysis (Hankivsky et al., 2014) moves beyond looking at singular categories to explore the intersection of two or more axes of oppression (Hankivsky et al., 2010). Further, the framework was applied specifically to examine policies which may influence decision-making among people who identify as women, including trans women, and whose social locations and lived experiences of policy relate to the identity of being a woman. We acknowledge that people with diverse gender identities including agender, gender expansive, and non-binary or pan-gender people also experience social locations of marginalisation which impact sexual and reproductive health and rights, including reproductive decision-making. However, the scope of this analysis was on how policies considered intersections of social oppression with regards to identities and lived experiences of women specifically.

The framework included pre-analysis reflexivity to facilitate users to examine their own conceptualisation of intersectionality and gender for the analysis. The analysis phase set out four key domains to interrogate with regards to intersectionality: the representation of the problem, the history of the representation of the problem, the differential impacts of the representation of the problem, and the policy solutions to the problem. Within each domain there were key questions and prompts to guide the analysis, such as about underlying assumptions, use of evidence and positioning of key stakeholders and/or individuals. A final post-analysis reflection was

Table 1. Victoria policy instruments.

Policies included in the analysis	Orientation (micro, meso, macro)	Intersectionality considered in solutions to the problem representation (comprehensively, limited consideration, not considered)
Abortion Law Reform Act 2008	Micro Meso	Not considered
Adoption Act 1984: Version No. 070	Micro	Not considered
Adoption Amendment Act 2013	Micro	Not considered
Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008: Version No. 021	Micro Meso	Limited consideration
Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2013	Micro Meso	Not considered
Children's Legislation Amendment Act 2008	Meso	Not considered
Children Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2017	Micro Meso	Not considered
Equal Opportunity Act 2010: Version No. 020	Macro	Not considered
Equal Opportunity Amendment Act 2011	Macro	Not considered
Equal Opportunity Amendment (Family Responsibilities) Act 2008	Macro	Not considered
Family Violence Protection Amendment (Safety Notices) Act 2011	Micro	Not considered
Law of Abortion: Final Report 2008	Micro Meso	Limited consideration
Maintenance Act 1965: Version No. 050	Micro	Limited consideration
Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008	Macro	Not considered
Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009	Macro	Not considered
Public Health and Wellbeing Regulation Amendment 2018	Macro	Not considered
Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy 2016	Macro	Limited consideration
State Superannuation Act 1988: Version No. 083	Micro	Not considered
Victorian Families Statement 2011	Macro	Not considered
Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key Priorities 2017–2020	Macro Meso	Limited consideration

included to facilitate users to consider the implications of the analysis.

Policies were deductively coded into each of the four domains of the framework by two researchers, using NVivo^{TM}. Due to the number and scope of policies, "bracketing" was used to enable researchers to focus on data relevant to intersectionality. Data were inductively thematically analysed to identify common themes within each domain and then across domains. Post-analysis reflection assisted with writing the themes in each domain, including what the key findings from the analysis in its entirety were; and what the implications of these findings for intersectionality, WRDM and future policy are.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Domain 1: Representation of the Problem

The first domain explores the "problem" that the policies proposed to address, including assumptions and evidence underpinning those representations. The representation of the "problem" related to WRDM with a specific focus on how the representations consider and/or account for intersectionality.

Of the twenty policies included in the analysis, ten were oriented at addressing the micro level. Among these, a common problem representation identified was that women's reproductive decisions are conceptualised as individual "problems" that sit within a woman's domain to be managed at the individual level. Multiple assumptions, explicit and implicit, embedded in the policies reinforce the problematisation of reproductive decision-making issues as individual. For example, the 2008 Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act requires that "before a woman consents to undergo a treatment procedure, the woman and her partner, if any, must have received counselling (including counselling in relation to the prescribed matters)" (Victorian Government, 2008a, p. 15). This language requires only that counselling must be received, not that the counselling is understood or comprehended. This implies and emphasises individual agency in taking responsibility and control for one's own health and wellbeing. Such assumptions do not consider intersecting social relations of power which may impact individuals' capacity to act with agency, or the broader circumstances and environment in which individuals experience their health and wellbeing. Existing research reveals policies which universalise women's identities and experiences, and that position women as individually responsible for their own health and wellbeing, can serve to create and perpetuate social exclusion of women. Such policies can ignore and reinforce the "multiple and mutually constitutive forms of discrimination…oppression [and privilege]" (Agénor et al., 2021, p. 65) that influence WRDM in the context of various intersecting social locations of marginalisation. Failure to acknowledge that women's intersectional experiences require nuanced and targeted policy responses could reinforce social exclusion, particularly of those already marginalised (Agénor et al., 2021; Botfield et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2016, 2018; Kapilashrami, 2020; Morison & Herbert, 2019).

Seven policies addressed meso-level matters and nine policies addressed the macro level. Policies oriented at the meso and macro levels focused on population health and system inequities, and take somewhat more consideration of social diversity and women's intersectional experiences in these problem representations compared to micro level policies. For example, the *Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Key Priorities 2017–2020* (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017) highlights inequities that exist in access to health services including sexual and reproductive health and rights, services, information, and support, and subsequent health outcomes for diverse women, particularly in relation to reproductive decisions and choices. The instrument acknowledges the need for more equitable access for women who experience various intersecting social positions of marginalisation such as women living in rural or regional locations, women living with disability, those who are carers of a person living with a disability, women with specific cultural needs, and other marginalised groups in order to have greater impact. The *Safe and Strong: Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* considers gender inequality a structural issue and explicitly recognises intersecting social relations of power in the problem representation, stating: "For many, the impact of gender inequality is compounded by the way that gendered barriers interact with other forms of disadvantage and discrimination" (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2016, p. 4). It adds:

> The Victorian Government recognises that gender inequality is even more of a problem when it Intersects with other forms of inequality and disadvantage, such as Aboriginality, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, rurality and socio-economic status. There is no one size fits all approach to addressing it. (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2016, p. ii)

However, problematic in several policies at all levels was the construction of "gender" itself. The *Safe and Strong: Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* recognises that gender stereotypes develop early and are entrenched. Notably though, this strategy defines "gender" as "the socially-constructed differences between men and women" (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2016, p. 36), while trans identity is defined separately. This reinforces entrenched and exclusionary binary gender norms of what it is to identify and live as "man" or "woman," and excludes trans women from consideration within the strategy with regards to problem representations, impacts, and solutions that impact women.

Several other policies make no distinction between genders, using gender-neutral language instead, including the 2011 Family Violence Protection Amendment (Safety Notices) Act (Victorian Government, 2011), the 1984 Adoption Act (version 70; Victorian Government, 2016), the 2008 Children's Legislation Amendment Act (Victorian Government, 2008b), and the *Victorian Families Statement 2011* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2011). The 2010 Equal Opportunity Act (Victorian Government, 2015) aims for the realisation of equality for all and so makes no distinction between genders in many clauses, for instance, referring to all "employees" homogenously in support of the notion of equality. However, in doing so, it fails to acknowledge the level of inequality or disadvantage already existing which is compounded for women and marginalised groups such as trans women, much less women with various other intersecting social locations and experiences of marginalisation. This could potentially result in negative impacts for those individuals and groups.

The limited and limiting socio-normative gender constructions perpetuate the hidden nature of intersecting experiences of marginalisation in the representation of the problem in policies. Graham et al. (2016) previously argued that the state contributes to creating and perpetuating gender norms through policies that relate to reproductive decision-making. Thus, the representation of the problem in policies relevant to WRDM is critical to challenging essentialising stereotypes of women and acknowledging women's intersectional experiences.

Details about policy consultation and development processes, including how policy decisions were made, and whose voices were considered and/or absent in the processes (including any recognition of stakeholders with intersectional experiences), are largely lacking across all instruments. Only three instruments provide any details about these processes, namely, the *Law of Abortion: Final Report 2008* (Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2008), *Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key Priorities 2017–2020* (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017), and *Safe and Strong: Victorian Gender Equality Strategy 2016* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2016). Each provides details of processes including community consultations with women of diverse and intersectional experiences. Popay (2006) developed a widely-accepted and utilised model for community engagement to achieve health improvement. The typology shows activities like consultation as low-level on the continuum of engagement activities and having no real effect on changing social and material conditions which influence health outcomes. Rather, activities like co-production and power sharing are more effective in effecting equitable change, and thus should be considered for policy development relevant to populations with diverse and intersecting experiences of marginalisation. Hankivsky et al. (2010) supports this argument, stating those involved in intersectional policy development should be committed to understanding and shifting power relations to challenge oppressive social systems and bring about social change. However, this analysis reveals there is a greater capacity to extend community engagement in policy development processes concerning WRDM. The *Victorian Families Statement 2011* and the *Safe and Strong: Victorian Gender Equality Strategy 2016* also allude to future collaborations but are not explicit about the processes. For instance, the *Victorian Families Statement* suggests "a genuine and ongoing discussion between the government and Victorian families about what is important, what is needed and how we are progressing is going to be essential" (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2011, p. 3). The *Safe and Strong: Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* makes several references to "recognis[ing] women's leadership," "continu[ing] to support and grow" women's leadership, and creating "strategic alliances…to identify and respond to the challenges of gender inequality and how they affect their communities" (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2016, p. 20). While these statements hold some promise, there is a gap in firm commitment and action to meaningful community engagement in policy development influencing WRDM.

Notably, the instruments that did evidence some community engagement are all policy guidelines and strategies rather than legislative instruments, suggesting a gap in consultation and a lack of intersectional voices in policy processes to develop legislation influencing WRDM, particularly that which is proximal to women's experiences of reproductive decision-making.

3.2. Domain 2: History of the Representation of the Problem

This domain explores the history of the representation of the problem, including how the context of the representation of the problem has changed over time, and whether or how the positioning of women in the representation has changed over time.

There exists limited data indicating changes in representation of the problem over time as few policy instruments explicitly discussed this. The *Law of Abortion: Final Report 2008* is an exception. It recognises the influence of medical professional dominance in determining women's access to abortion historically, but that this context has changed. There is now a greater focus on consumers' autonomy, with the report explaining that "the ethical principles underlying doctor–patient relationships have moved on considerably in the past few decades….Personal autonomy is one of the guiding principles of medical law" and, further, "community attitudes [have] further shifted towards reproductive autonomy. It is likely that this in turn meant that reproductive autonomy became more institutionalised within the medical profession" (Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2008, p. 147). The report states laws governing abortion in Victoria were "strongly criticised" (p. 16) for being out of date with these shifting medical and community attitudes, but Victorian laws have since changed, removing abortion from the Criminal Act to bring laws more in line with community and medical profession expectations.

However, in the context of debates about abortion law reform, while this report did acknowledge that recognition of social diversities had advanced, consideration of intersectionality in the problem representation is not explicit and so was underrepresented in key evidence used to inform the subsequent law reform. The amended law, the 2008 Victoria Abortion Law Reform Act, shows no evidence of considering women's intersecting experiences and locations of marginalisation in amendments to, or application of, the law. Further, the Act makes no reference to women's diverse identities, experiences or needs, defining any woman simply as "a female person of any age" (Victorian Government, 2008c, p. 3).

Evidence of changes in the positionings of women in the problem representation was also limited. Again, the *Law of Abortion: Final Report* (2008) is the exception. This report describes that, "historically, medical discourse has treated women as biologically unstable, psychologically or socially vulnerable, and therefore in need of protection and control" (Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2008, p. 147), with women essentialised in those historical discourses. This positioning is particularly evident in policies which represent women's reproductive issues as a medical problem at an individual level, as discussed in Domain 1. Such positionings contribute to reinforcing "power over women…at the individual level, and destructive discourses at the institutional level" (Bourgeois, 2014, p. 31) which limit women's reproductive autonomy and rights. The report claims the contemporary positioning of women in the policy as one of increased self-determination and autonomy in medical contexts generally, but that women's reproductive autonomy remains constrained and subject to continue institutional medicalisation of women's reproductive decisions, particularly concerning abortion. However, recognition of intersectionality in the changing positionings of women is again absent. Previous research contends women's health and reproductive issues have become politicised whereby women's private reproductive choices have become public (Charles, 2000), and the "personal is political" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 788). The politicisation of women's health and reproductive issues could "contribute to disregarding intersectionality in questions regarding reproductive health" (Sommer & Forman-Rabinovici, 2020, p. 2), and pose a barrier to achieving developments in women's health including progress toward achieving several of the United Nations SDGs (Sommer & Forman-Rabinovici, 2020). Conversely, policy that considers reproductive rights and health as a broader public policy issue beyond the public health domain, and considers intersecting social relations of power in that broader context which may influence WRDM, could contribute to more effective, equitable, and socially inclusive policy influencing WRDM.

At the macro level, the *Safe and Strong: Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2016) recognises the improved social status and participation of women in leadership over time, particularly regarding issues of gender equality, women's health and the reduction of gender-based violence. The strategy bases this recognition on evidence of effectiveness of women-led health organisations and advocacy networks driving change in these areas. Thus, the strategy positions women both individually and collectively as contemporary organisational and community leaders and change-makers, and with an enhanced agency now compared to historically. However, "women" in this positioning are still largely essentialised, with an absence of recognition of the multiple intersectional experiences of women. Overall, the problem representations and women's positionings in those problem representations have evolved, but policy is not progressing in alignment with those changes as an intersectional lens is still largely absent. Further development in this regard is needed to increase reproductive equity, autonomy and rights for all women.

3.3. Domain 3: Differential Impacts of the Representation of the Problem

This domain sought to interrogate how and in what ways women were impacted by the representation of the problem, and particularly, whether differential impacts for women with intersecting social locations of marginalisation were recognised. The domain also considered whether problem representations perpetuate essentialised gender stereotypes and dominant systems of oppression, or challenge these.

Impacts of the problem representations are identified as falling disproportionately on women, including economic inequities, disproportionate burdens of caregiving, experiences of violence, negative mental and physical health and wellbeing impacts, and negative social impacts. Consideration of differential impacts for women with intersectional lived experiences varied. Generally, micro-level policies considered more proximal to WRDM, while tending not to recognise intersectionality in the problem representation (as discussed in Domain 1), did recognise and acknowledge the differential impacts of the problem for women who experience multiple intersecting positions of marginalisation. For example, the 2008 Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act (Victorian Government, 2008a) acknowledges generally that increasing medicalisation of reproduction and decision-making can impact women differentially due to women's diverse socio-demographic characteristics, but does not elaborate on the nature of those impacts or provide examples. The *Law of Abortion: Final Report* (Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2008) recognises many inequities in access to abortion services disproportionately impact women already marginalised due to low socio-economic status, rural and remote location, lower education status, and with compromised health of mother and/or foetus. However, the report is not legislative so it does not have the capacity to redress this in law, highlighting systemic and structural limitations, and gaps that remain for promoting intersectional equity, rights, and social inclusion.

In contrast, recognition of differential impacts for women with intersectional experiences is generally lacking in meso- and macro-oriented policies which are more distal to WRDM. For example, the 2010 Equal Opportunity Act (Victorian Government, 2015) recognises systemic discrepancies that perpetuate gender inequalities, such as gender-based pay gaps and leadership gaps. However, the Act does not consider or account for how the impacts of these discrepancies may impact women of diverse identities differently and perpetuate inequities for women with intersecting social positions and experiences of marginalisation. Graham et al. (2022) argued there is a gap in understanding the impacts of policy on women's reproductive decisions and experiences of those decisions. This need is compounded for women with intersectional lived experiences as current policy appears to inconsistently acknowledge differential impacts, and this needs to be addressed in future policy. The exception among the meso- and macro-level policies is the *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2016). This strategy recognises compounding inequities in various domains including education and training; work and economic security; health, wellbeing and safety; leadership and participation; sport and recreation; and media, arts, and culture for a range of women including pregnant women, single mothers, Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, migrant women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or refugee backgrounds, and those living in rural and regional areas.

Many systems of oppression operating at multiple levels including institutions, society and systemically are implicitly suggested or alluded to across policies, but scarcely explicated. These systems included sexism, ageism, racism, colonialism, ableism, heterosexism, transphobia, classism, and carceralism. Only racism and sexism are explicitly referred to in *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*, and racism is discussed concerning experiences of Aboriginal Australians but not other diverse cultural or ethnic groups, and not specifically about intersections with gender.

Recognition of intersections of systems of oppression is largely absent across the instruments, and therefore not addressed or challenged in the policy documents. This further entrenches the hidden nature of intersecting social relations of power and the differential impacts for diverse women of representations of problems in policy. The exception to this is again the *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*, which provides several examples suggesting intersecting systems of oppression. One example discusses how women living with disability "are less likely to be in paid employment and are paid comparatively less than men with a disability or women without a disability" (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2016, p. 4). This suggests interactive influences of sexism and ableism influencing experiences of employment for women living with a disability. However, the strategy stops short of explicitly identifying these systems of oppression and their intersections; rather, it is up to the reader to be able to identify and interpret these.

Embedded systems of oppression are created and perpetuated by macro-level socio-cultural and institutional values and practices. There is a pressing need for explicit articulation and recognition of the systems, their intersections, and the impacts of these in policies influencing WRDM. Reproductive health policy is often framed through either a socio-normative morality lens or a feminist lens that reflects and reinforces dominant systems of inclusion/exclusion but fails to account for women's diverse intersecting locations and experiences of marginalisation (Sommer & Forman-Rabinovici, 2020). Further, Manuel (2006, pp. 194–195) argues:

> Public policy scholars tend to propose policy solutions that are "politically" feasible. That typically means solutions that appeal to the mainstream are simple, and work within the existing institutional framework. This kind of reductionism and incrementalism has the impact of narrowing our ability to see and respond to the more multifaceted ways that identity markers shape our experiences.

Foregrounding reproductive issues as public health and broader social issues in policy, rather than morality, feminist or politico-legal issues, may enable greater consideration of the health contexts and needs of diverse and intersecting identity groups (Sommer & Forman-Rabinovici, 2020).

3.4. Domain 4: Policy Solutions to the "Problem"

The final domain considers solutions to the representations of the problem in the policies, including whether or not solutions consider women's intersecting social locations and experiences of marginalisation, and how these are positioned. It also explores whether proposed policy solutions reinforce or challenge gender-based inequities for diverse women, and inconsistencies or incongruences in proposed policy solutions.

In the majority of policy instruments, proposed policy solutions reinforce the representation of the problem as being at the individual level. Policy solutions oriented at the micro level with individualised problem representations are often stringently defined and inflexible, or applied universally to a defined population without considering women's multiple and intersecting locations of marginalisation, or are restrictive and conditional. This is also the case for some legislative Acts with meso and macro level problem representations, but which have regulatory policy solutions oriented at addressing problems through individual operationalisation and accountabilities. For instance, the 2008 Public Health and Wellbeing Act (Victorian Government, 2008d) and the 2010 Equal Opportunity Act (Victorian Government, 2015) acknowledge and support diversity in policy solutions, for example making provisions for people living with disability, but not intersectionality with gender or other intersections. Rather, these Acts are applied universally, referring to all people or persons, or other homogenising terms (for example, "employee," in the case of the 2010 Equal Opportunity Act).

Some instruments propose solutions which seek to challenge the representation of the problem as being individual by proposing solutions which either fully or partially focus on addressing organisational, social, cultural, and systemic problem representations. However, consideration of women's intersectional experiences in these policy solutions is variable, or sometimes unclear or inconsistent. For instance, The *Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key Priorities 2017–2020* takes a systems-based approach with the "aim to create an effective system to…support optimal sexual and reproductive health for Victorian women" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017, p. 11). The strategy identifies structural and systemic barriers to women attaining optimal sexual and reproductive health and rights and proposes solutions to address those barriers through actions including collaborations, advocacy, and service and systems change rather than placing the onus on women's individual health-seeking behaviours. Examples of solutions include, “foster sexual health services free from stigma and discrimination” (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017, p. 12) and “develop innovative models to improve confidential and safe access to contraception in primary care for all Victorians, particularly in regional and rural areas, including via innovative technologies such as phone apps for young people” (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017, p. 14). The latter example also demonstrates that policy solutions do consider some intersectional experiences, in this case for women in rural and regional areas and females of young age. Aboriginal women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are also considered in the policy solutions of the strategy. Notably, though, the language used sometimes refers to “Victorians” and “young people” rather than women, young women, or females. It may be implied that this includes women and female young people as the strategy is specifically addressing women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights priorities. However, it is unclear whether this is a purposeful use of language in order to be inclusive of diverse and marginalised gender identities (for instance, trans) and intersections with those gender identities, or conversely, whether this language represents a failure to capture the complexity of gender identities and intersectionality.

The *Victorian Families Statement 2011* also focuses on creating physical and social conditions to promote health and wellbeing, in the context of families; including addressing public transport, community safety, education and training opportunities, and services. It explicitly recognises the diversity of Victorian families, stating:

> There is no typical Victorian family. Victorians live in single-parent households, blended, step and extended families. Some of us are starting a family while others have seen their children grow up and move out to live independent lives. Some couples choose not to have children, some people choose to live alone or in group households and some include same-sex relationships. Some families have recently arrived in Victoria from different parts of Australia and the world while aboriginal families have called this place home for many thousands of years. Amongst us, there are families who are struggling and families who are enjoying success. Regardless, they all make up the fabric of Victorian society. (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2011, p. 4)

Diversity is subsequently recognised in several proposed macro-level problem solutions; for example, the varying needs of families in diverse locations are recognised in the commitment that the government will “develop a population strategy that covers all our regions. Rural and regional families will benefit from better infrastructure, better services, and a more inclusive, connected approach” (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2011, p. 12). However while diversity is recognised, the intersection(s) of diverse social locations or experiences of marginalisation are not articulated, nor specifically for women. So, while there is promise in some instruments which seek to challenge individualised problem representations and solutions, there is scope for the problem solutions to go further in more fully and explicitly considering and addressing intersectional social locations and experiences of marginalisation of women.

4. Conclusions

The analysis highlights widespread limitations and incongruence across policies and within policies concerning how intersectionality is recognised in problem representations, impacts of the problems, and policy solutions. Meso- and macro-level policies are somewhat distal to WRDM but have a role in creating the conditions and environment to effect equity regarding reproductive decision-making. The policies examined at this level tend to somewhat recognise diverse and intersectional experiences of women in the representation of problems but fail to articulate the impacts and policy solutions in ways that enhance equity and inclusion for women with intersectional lived experiences. Policies oriented at micro-level contexts which are more proximal to WRDM generally fail to acknowledge women’s intersecting social locations of marginalisation in the overall problem representation. The policies examined mostly acknowledge differential impacts of problems for women with intersectional experiences, but the representation of the problem and policy solutions to address those problem representations are often incongruent with this. These inconsistencies and gaps within policies limit the potential for real and effective operationalisation, hindering the ability to be socially inclusive for all.

The importance and benefits of applying an intersectional lens to policy analysis are now widely recognised and advocated for (Hankivsky et al., 2010). However, this is the first intersectional analysis of policies influencing WRDM. This is important given the centrality of reproductive decisions to reproductive health and rights, and overall population health equity and advancement. As shown in this analysis, policy is lagging in terms of being inclusive for all through an intersectional lens. While this analysis has provided important insights, limitations to the generalisability of the research findings are that it focuses on the policy context of one state (Victoria) in a high-income country (Australia) and examines policies at a point in time with limited historical comparative data or capacity to respond to any dynamic changes that may occur in policies.

Policy can serve as a strategic platform for effective systemic change by redressing inequities through both the policy instrument and the process of policy development. Policy-makers should consider and apply an intersectional policy analysis framework during policy development to ensure gender and intersectionality are accounted for and avoid inequitable and incongruent policy outcomes.

Similarly, greater attention to the collection and critique of relevant data is needed to enable an intersectional approach to problem representation, impact recognition and policy solutions. This includes disaggregated data about populations and health issues, and the diversity and intersectional experiences of those involved in policy-making.

Crucially, people need to be at the centre of policy. An intersectional approach to policy development involves the creation of strategic alliances to redress social exclusion and empower marginalised groups (Hankivsky et al., 2010). In particular, a focus on community participation, partnerships and reflexivity of all stakeholders involved is needed (Hankivsky et al., 2010). Greater representation of women with intersecting social locations of marginalisation is crucial for the development of meaningful and inclusive health and social policy influencing WRDM and thus reproductive health and rights. Further, the critical reflexivity of all partners involved in the policy-making process and their subjectivities in relation to the policy should be central to any policy-making process.

This analysis has highlighted vast gaps in how policies related to WRDM consider intersectionality. Policy that essentialises women can exacerbate inequities and social exclusion particularly for marginalised individuals and groups. Moving forward, policy needs to recognise and be inclusive of all individuals, embracing the diversity that exists. Specific to this work, this is needed to benefit all women and their reproductive health and rights. However, more broadly, the concept of an intersectionality lens for all policy warrants further exploration. Applying an intersectional lens to this policy analysis has highlighted the refinement and redressing of policies that are needed to promote women's health for all, and for future informed policy development and social inclusion through policy processes, implementation, and impacts.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

The University and Social Work Under Neoliberalism: Where's the Social Inclusion for Disabled Faculty?

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Abstract
There is an urgent need to increase the social inclusion of postsecondary faculty with disabilities by reducing the need to adapt to ableist and sanist neoliberal standards. In this article, two social work faculty with disabilities argue that their social exclusion is inevitable under systemic neoliberal priorities of individualism, efficiency, and productivity. We engage in a systems analysis of how educational institutions, namely universities, engage in practices and processes of social exclusion of faculty with disabilities through neoliberal ideologies, policies, and practices. Using an autoethnographic case study method, guided by an intersectional and disability justice theoretical framing, the authors challenge the ahistorical and non-relational tendencies of neoliberalism in its many forms. Using lived experience as data, the authors elucidate strategies to promote social inclusion aimed at universities and at the discipline of social work. In conclusion, the authors advocate for change at the structural level for the social work profession and for postsecondary institutions.

Keywords
disability; disabled faculty; neoliberalism; postsecondary education; social work; university

Issue
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1. Introduction

According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability, approximately "20% of academic staff at colleges and universities self-identify as living with one or more disabilities" (CAUT, 2021, para. 3). Scholarship on the experience of faculty with disabilities in postsecondary settings centres mainly on pedagogical challenges in the classroom (Allen, 2015; Helmer, 2016; Woolley, 2022) and tends to ignore first-hand professional experiences of social exclusion. An exception is a report on the challenges of five tenured faculty with disabilities in Canada navigating neoliberal principles (Waterfield et al., 2018). Literature on the lived experience of subordinate groups that have intersectional identities, including individuals with disabilities (students, healthcare professionals, and recipients of social and health services) reveals their immediate accessibility concerns but does not adequately address the need for systemic overhauls of the broader social system (i.e., neoliberalism) to enhance social inclusion (Cain & Velasco, 2021; Colbert & Chan, 2020; Drummond & Brotman, 2014; Harley et al., 2002; Hunter et al., 2020; O'Shea et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2012; Toft, 2020; Vaughn et al., 2015). Social work regulatory bodies and professional associations have largely remained silent regarding the social exclusion of social workers with disabilities under neoliberalism.

Social exclusion can be understood as a form of oppression created by power relationships and historical and institutional processes that marginalize certain communities in society (Galabuzi, 2012) such as those with disabilities. Ideally, strategies and recommendations for social inclusion, particularly in the social system of postsecondary education, should emphasize the creation of environments where all community members are valued and able to participate fully (Dumbrill

& Yee, 2019). Neoliberalism is defined as the economic and political doctrine widely adopted in Western capitalist nations since the 1970s that emphasizes the free market—reducing the role of the state in business as well as the role of the welfare state in social protection—state deregulation, and the need for productivity and efficiency to reduce costs (Chernomas & Hudson, 2007; Harvey, 2009; Navarro, 2002). Social exclusion under neoliberalism is a multifaceted type of oppression exercised through ideological, cultural, economic, social, and political forces. These rely on market politics (acquisition of capital and capitalism) to respond to social issues in the nation-state of Canada. Historically, neoliberalism has reduced government interventions for collective and social problems. Instead, neoliberalism forces individuals, irrespective of race, gender, age, citizenship, and more to depend on their individual skills and the market to meet all of their needs. As a result of neoliberal advancement, business management models now govern faculties and schools of social work across the nation (Carey, 2008; Garrett, 2010). Social issues are constructed in an ahistorical fashion whereby individual responsibilities are provoked to address social problems (Weinberg, 2017). Within a neoliberal framing, institutions such as universities rely on hierarchical top-down approaches to policy and practice decisions by bolstering discourses of meritocracy (Baines, 2010, 2015) and responsibilization (Barry et al., 1996; Rose, 1996) to structure daily happenings. The dominant ideology in Canada, neoliberalism is manifested in the social exclusion of faculty with disabilities via capitalist principles of government and institutional austerity, individual accountability, efficiency, and productivity. Through these narrow neoliberalist principles:

> We create people within whose minds and bodies we locate inability to contribute. Those we are afraid of, who work differently, who work more slowly, who need flexibility, and perhaps even those who require information in different formats, working situations that embrace limited mobility become all too difficult. (Goggin & Newell, 2005, p. 21)

Institutions such as universities position themselves as using the "disguise" of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). As faculty members with disabilities at a Canadian university, we contend that universities hire disabled faculty (some with other intersecting identities) under EDI mandates, yet fail to prioritize social inclusion in their strategic priorities, policies, and everyday practices. Our approach to the social inclusion of faculty with disabilities is intersectional and expansive, as the social construct of disability is inherently dynamic: contingent on social, cultural, historical, and political markers. In examining the functional impact of our disabilities, we use a social model, which emphasizes external barriers to social inclusion as the primary source of "disability." We strive to understand how external barriers, whether visible (e.g., architectural) or non-visible (attitudinal or based in information and communication), prevent full inclusion for people with disabilities, rather than focusing on our individual disability-related limitations and responsibility to rely on reactive compensatory strategies and accommodations (Barnes, 2007; Goode, 2007; Oliver, 1986; Oliver & Barnes, 2012). It should be noted that the authors of this article recognize the importance of language. We feel that both person-first language and disabled-first language have merits, so we use the terms interchangeably.

2. Methods

This case study is formatted in a conversational, narrative, autoethnographic style (Chang et al., 2016) based on the authors' experiences of living and working with varying disabilities at a Canadian university. Although we have multifaceted identities and experiences, emphasis is placed on the disability facet to illustrate systematic social exclusion. This style allowed us to collect data that reflects our personal and professional experiences in the institutions of universities and social work regulatory bodies and professional associations, within the confines of the broader neoliberal systems of government legislation, policies, and funding. Autoethnographic approaches are not traditionally used for systemic and structure-based analyses (O'Hara, 2018). We opted for this approach to underscore the importance of connecting "the personal" to "the political," and therefore use our everyday experiences (thoughts, feelings, embodiment, intersectional identities) of social exclusion as data for systemic analysis (Pitard, 2019).

Post-modern feminists have used autoethnographic methods to create situated subjugated knowledges that challenge dominant discourses through critical intersectional perspectives (Collins, 1986, 1997, 2009; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). In addition to an intersectional standpoint, we use a disability justice framework (Berner, 2015; Jama, 2020) to analyse the autoethnographic accounts. Both aforementioned perspectives consider lived experiences as knowledge sources worthy of exploration and validation to counter normative discourses and practices. In accounting our experience, each author speaks from their particular standpoint (i.e., disabled, white, cisgender, queer, male; and disabled, racialized, cisgender, queer, female) in ways that are not mutually exclusive, yet are fluid and unfixed with particular grounding in sociopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts of a given situation, practice, policies, and institutional processes. This point will be illustrated in the narratives below as discourse politics related to "born with," "acquired," and "invisible" disabilities play out in the lives of the authors. Therefore, we will point out the various and dynamic nuances of how institutional processes, attitudes of university administration and peers, and normative perceptions of disability, abilities, and capabilities are understood and performed through various oppressive mechanisms (i.e., ableist, neoliberal, and sanist) and norms. We reflect on accessibility barriers that contribute to the social exclusion we experience every day and the ableist structures that sustain them. We believe that our experiences are not unique; rather, they are likely shared by most faculty members with disabilities, particularly those with intersecting identities. We were guided by three questions: What is disability justice? What does social exclusion look like in the university and in social work regulatory bodies and professional associations? How might we increase accessibility (and hence, social inclusion) for faculty with disabilities?

3. What Is Disability Justice?

3.1. A Perspective: Author 1

"Disability justice" offers a blueprint for the social inclusion of people with disabilities. I consider it a liberationist framework. It's about direct action, challenging oppressive capitalist structures, and creating solidarity among members of the disabled community. As a framework, it was initially defined in 2005 by a group of activists—queer disabled women of colour. Today, disability justice is formally defined based on 10 principles outlined in the Sins Invalid blog (Berner, 2015). Queer liberation theory (McKenzie, 2020; Mulé, 2012), another liberationist framework, has a lot in common with disability justice. Both models suggest that we take inspiration from and align with other social justice movements, like Black Lives Matter, to help disability communities develop tools and skills to remove barriers and challenge oppression.

I get excited when I think about applying disability justice to challenge ableist structures that result in barriers to social inclusion, instead of expecting people with disabilities to "fit in" and overcome their "deficits." Challenging oppressive structures has become a more pressing need since Covid and the corresponding growth of the alt-right movement in Canada. We have less trust and social cohesion, and we need major social action to get our communities working together.

3.2. A Perspective: Author 2

Disability justice cannot be separated from racial justice, queer justice, or land justice. You can't advocate for one facet without the others. I am not able to separate my queerness from my race or disability, among other identity facets and experiences. Disability justice needs to speak to people's lived experiences and identities. The principle of "intersectionality" outlined in the ten principles of the disability justice framework tells us just that (Berner, 2015, para 6). In the current neoliberal context, "recognizing wholeness" and "commitment to cross-disability solidarity" really pop out because considering an individual's potential and capacity cannot come at the expense of one identity facet over another (Berner, 2015, para 9). Historically, the discipline of social work and Western universities have minimized peoples' uniqueness by highlighting reason over spirit and emotions. Neoliberalism makes it so that people are seen as ahistorical individuals floating around without social, political, and material realities and histories. Notions of merit, competition, and individuality need to be challenged from community-centred perspectives (King, 2015).

Neoliberalism is the antithesis of disability justice and intersectional perspectives. I can't hyper-produce in academe (publications, research grants, and university commitments), despite the push from organizational culture and policy. "Publish or perish" haunts my nightmares. It's why many individuals with disabilities have left academe behind. I must maintain a certain level of wellness to function as a spouse, sister, daughter, neighbour, and citizen. Academe makes no concessions for these other roles; I am a part of the machine and must function in an individualistic and ahistorical manner. Neoliberal ideologies, policies, and culture don't allow time and resources for care and understanding and don't value my focus on quality over quantity.

4. What Does Social Exclusion look like in the University, Social Work Regulatory Bodies, and Professional Associations?

4.1. Author 1

My relationship with structural social work, first as a student and now as a faculty member, has been helpful. As a queer person with an invisible disability, I have never felt that I "fit in." Social work appealed to me for my postsecondary education because it exposed me to critical, social justice perspectives that validated my lived experience of social exclusion and helped me to accept and value myself (as well as others with non-mainstream positionalities). Maybe more importantly, structural social work values action over the helpless acceptance of inequity (Mullaly, 2007).

I realize that in many ways I'm "lucky." My disability and my queerness are largely invisible, that is, not readily apparent to others in an educational and professional context. It's only when I "out myself" that I risk social exclusion due to attitudinal barriers. To avoid exposing my learning disability (LD), I have always had to work harder and longer than my classmates and faculty peers. I have had to develop creative adaptive strategies and be a strong and persistent self-advocate to access accommodations and supports to compensate for the impact of my LD, both as a student and later as a university faculty member.

My postsecondary education was meaningful and fulfilling in the context of my social location. That said, when we critically interrogate the broader social work profession, we see that we're part of a system that continues to marginalize certain communities, including people with disabilities. There are many specific examples of structural inequity. The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) provides far less than is needed to live on, let alone participate fully in society. But many social workers act as gatekeepers, deciding who "deserves" ODSP and who doesn't. Social welfare systems like ODSP perpetuate the social exclusion of persons with disabilities, as they were intended to do by a capitalist system and government that perpetuate oppressive policies.

Compared to social workers on the front lines, as a university faculty member, I enjoy certain privileges, including autonomy from our oppressive social welfare system. I feel honoured to be a professor, helping students develop to their potential by exposing them to critical thinking and using it to evaluate policy and everyday experience and to see the profession of social work as an opportunity to create positive social change and work towards social justice. Unfortunately, significant barriers remain in the university environment, which claims to value equity, access, and inclusion. An "old school," ableist mentality persists. This is not surprising when considering the university's institutional history: how the university was founded, developed, and structured (for example, who is/was included and who was not).

4.2. Author 2

When I think about everyday experiences of social exclusion inside the social work profession in a university setting, I am reminded that these experiences are raced, gendered, ableist, sanist, and homophobic. Social work as a discipline and as a practice has not handled diversity well. There is a track record of the residential schools, current child welfare policies and practices that continue to remove Indigenous children from their families, communities, and traditions, and mass incarceration of Black Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC). There have been and are a plethora of calls to action put forth by BIPOC people and communities, and social work's responses to these have been outdated, slow, and in some cases, non-existent. I start to question the underlying social work values outlined in the Code of Ethics (Baines, 2017) and have been questioning my purpose in social work as a faculty member. What systemic changes need to happen? One of the first things the profession and university need to do is to acknowledge that there are systemic failures with regards to how accommodations are understood and facilitated. Is the practice of dehumanizing racialized disabled people a part of seeking out accommodations? The education system wants people who can represent, perhaps, sometimes in a tokenistic way. Academe in general is not ready to meaningfully respond to the needs of disabled, queer, racialized people when it comes to deconstructing and challenging ableism and sanism. I remember reading an article about Kimberly Crenshaw (Steinmetz, 2020) discussing how intersectionality is valid today. She was talking about holding multiple truths. One truth is that institutions can be terrible places for people with disabilities, queerness, and anyone who embodies significant "difference." Yet, at the same time, the institutions can facilitate the changing of minds and hearts and engage in community-based, socially just research. This is a constant struggle in academe and this tension is also paralleled in social work—is it meant to surveil and incarcerate or to liberate? It seems like all of it is in a complex web, mixed alongside other social systems like healthcare.

Students and community members see that you have made it into academe, but they don't see the emotional toll, pain, and ongoing challenges experienced around accommodations and accessibility at the university. There's this notion that you have somehow overcome the challenges such as racism, ableism, sanism, heteronormativity, and such forces. In academe, there's no overcoming these among other axes of systemic multifaceted and intersectional oppressions. Student constituents don't really get that I need support as well. Faculty members don't have a lot of access to some of the same resources (accommodations) offered by the university for students. Since we are somehow seen as "having made it" and somehow we don't need support anymore. Perhaps, if there was an issue related to race at the university and in the profession, it would probably be taken up in very different ways than disability, accessibility, and accommodations issues. People are like, "well, you're a prof., you make a certain amount of money," and so that privilege that comes with being in academia and embodying that space does not carry over to other aspects of my being. I struggle with that a lot.

Having invisible disabilities, for example, mental health circumstances and chronic eye disease, has been very difficult to navigate at the institution. I look fine but I am not. I wasn't born with any of these disabilities and acquiring these in my 30s has posed significant challenges in proving my capabilities to "do the job." There is a definite privilege associated with invisible disabilities and I do pass most of the time. However, there are also some drawbacks. There is a lot of stigma related to madness and illness, and the linking of one's competencies (personal abilities, intelligence, stamina, ambition) with scholarly outcomes and research mandates (productivity measured in quantity versus quality) happens immediately and swiftly, evident in the comments and practices of peers and administration. There is a silent accusation—*if you can't handle the pressure and job, then leave*. Over the years, administrators and colleagues have minimized my challenges (advocating for software and more time) as I do not have visible disabilities. At the same time, prejudiced tropes about my race, religion, and ethnicity always underline conversations about disability. I have to perform an over-acting of gratitude for accessibility tools and be the grateful beggar. The patriarchal paternalism and benevolence are always part and parcel of securing accessibility.

5. How Might We Foster Greater Social Inclusion for Faculty With Disabilities?

5.1. Author 1

The university presents itself as an open, welcoming environment that celebrates diversity, including disability. Compared to their predecessors, students with disabilities are less likely to struggle to access adaptive academic accommodations. Advances have (thankfully) developed over recent decades, along with an awareness of their right to access postsecondary education. In general, faculty are more supportive, and universities now have designated disability services offices staffed by knowledgeable professionals.

Like students, faculty with disabilities have a legal right to accommodations. According to the Ontario Human Rights Code (Ontario, 2021) and the Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act (Ontario, 2016), universities are obligated to provide appropriate disability-related accommodations for employees, barring undue hardship (e.g., excessive cost) provided the employee (e.g., faculty) can reliably perform the essential duties of their position. That said, policies on accommodations only go so far in creating social inclusion. As a professor, it's still very much a balancing act when it comes to deciding when, how, and even if I should ask for accommodations, because of lingering misconceptions and attitudinal barriers about disability.

I applied for my current position when I was nearing completion of my PhD. Because I wanted to be true to myself, I disclosed my LD. Besides, I had already published an account comparing my lived experience as a student with LD at three Ontario universities, identifying discrepancies between what was officially claimed and my actual experiences in accessing accommodations and disability-related supports. I was encouraged by the statement in my job description that the university was "committed to employment equity and values diversity."

I was also open about the impact of my disability by providing a written description. I added: "As someone who has dealt with the lifelong challenges of having a learning disability, I have learned to adapt to my environment through hard work, perseverance, and resourcefulness." I stressed that my disability had led me to make my courses as accessible as possible for all kinds of students. This doesn't mean I make my courses "easier," but rather that I strive to reduce unnecessary barriers. I continue to integrate pedagogical practices that helped me as a student and avoid those that put me at a disability-related disadvantage. I am a strong believer in breaking down barriers by incorporating universal design for learning, not just for students with disabilities but for those in all social locations. Finally, in class, I am open about my disability to encourage students to ask me for support if they need it, without fear of stigma.

Since being hired, not surprisingly, I have continued to work hard to adapt and compensate for the impact of my disability. We are evaluated according to output of publications and grant applications (especially the successful ones!). Typical Canadian tenure-track faculty positions are based on the expectation that research should account for 40% of the time, teaching should account for another 40%, and service the remaining 20% (CAUT, 2018). I know in my heart that an LD is about basic information processing, not about intelligence. There is no shame in using these to adapt to neoliberal constraints. That said, I face significant barriers as a faculty member. I use compensatory strategies; I must plan grant applications and publications at least a year ahead, and because I need far more time for research activities, teaching, and service, I work very long hours during evenings and weekends. Reading software allows me to "read" without the need to convert written words into sounds (basic information processing that is automatic for those without an LD). I use dictation software to get my ideas on the page quickly, although I require extra time later to correct its recognition errors. I fear asking for formal accommodations, as it may make me seem "incompetent" under neoliberal ableism.

Unfortunately, I have learned that I could not do without certain accommodations if I am to meet neoliberal standards of individualism, efficiency, and productivity. I need more time to transition between different types of tasks (such as teaching vs. research) because of my LD. As an accommodation, I have formally requested that my assigned classes be scheduled for the same day. Despite supportive documentation from the psychologist, I discovered a gap between what I need and what the university will support. While the university readily provided the software I need, it has taken years to access equally necessary (but less tangible) accommodations for scheduling.

The university's openness to EDI, as it was included in my job description, would appear to indicate open acceptance and clear protocols for faculty seeking disability-related accommodations. The university administration set limits, perhaps to save money or maybe to avoid setting a precedent. For me, it is a constant struggle. I worry that colleagues may think I am incapable or incompetent, or that my disability-related accommodations are an unfair advantage, so I mask. Ableism is alive and well in academia. We need more awareness, as for the most part, administration and colleagues don't seem to understand that disability does not equal "inability"; that accommodations are meant to level the playing field by removing unnecessary barriers. So far, I am holding my own. That said, sometimes I feel like an imposter—a fraud who does not belong here.

As professors, especially in social work, we want to advocate for change, but at the same time, we must be mindful of job security. We are fortunate to have tenure-track positions at our university, but job insecurity is far greater for contract instructors, who teach 50% of undergraduate courses in Ontario universities (Council of Ontario Universities, 2018). Having a critical, action-oriented stance is important, but how far do you push? And how much do you risk by disclosing your invisible disabilities, let alone advocating for disability-related accommodations? Risk is a barrier. I think we've come a long way in supporting and providing accommodations for students with disabilities (even though we still have more work to do) but when it comes to university staff and faculty with disabilities, major barriers persist. The faculty union could play a critical role in reducing barriers, for example, by ensuring that collective agreements contain precise language that goes beyond vague statements about the duty to accommodate. This gets me thinking of an excellent article by Saltes (2020). They examined disability accommodation policies for faculty at 42 Canadian universities and found that more than half had no written policy at all, and that there was inconsistent policy implementation across those that did. Despite claims of commitment to human rights and equity, individualized and overtly medical language around disability results in the stigmatization of people with disabilities as incapable and may lead to a reticence on the part of faculty to disclose. Even the underlying legislation may contribute to marginalization of faculty with disabilities:

> Although all university accommodation policies in Canada are underpinned by antidiscrimination legislation and provincial human rights codes, at times the language used in legal provisions contributes to the exclusion and marginalisation that it seeks to address by using terminology to define disability that is rooted within a normative paradigm thus categorizing disabled people as "other." (Saltes, 2020, pp. 79–80)

There is a need for collective responsibility on the part of faculty with disabilities to seek out and validate their (legitimate) need for accommodations—as opposed to the emphasis on individual responsibility imposed by society's dominant neoliberal ideology, one that frames disability as a personal deficit. It shouldn't be daunting to disclose the need for accommodations, and it shouldn't be difficult to access and maintain them. I think that many aspects of the individual role of faculty with disabilities should be far more accessible.

5.2. Author 2

Accommodation, accessibility, and equity are like the "F" word in academe. As soon as you say you have an accommodation issue or request or you say you have an accessible need issue, then people are like, "whoa, hands off"—and treat the need for accommodations like something dirty. We need to normalize talking about everyone having options and access and unpack this myth of meritocracy and challenge individualism rampant within institutions. When accommodations and accessibility are considered things that can get you into trouble in legal terms, then people's defenses go up and they hide behind policies. The relational aspects of people interacting and trying to be a part of an institution of learning and of growth and critical orientations just really become the sidebar. For me, the relational aspect is very important and that's one of the ways that I really honour difference and sameness in teaching, research, and service work. Does it really matter to me at the end of the day that I need to see a doctor's note for a particular time that the student was away for mental health reasons or life circumstances? Some people may call me naïve in this regard. If someone is trying to con me, it's not on me but rather it's on them and about how they're walking and living their life. Matters of accommodation and accessibility are not just about obligation and duty and legality. For me, these are moral imperatives and existential undertakings.

6. Strategies to Enhance Meaningful and Sustainable Social Inclusion

Based on our conversations above, analysed through disability justice and intersectional perspectives, we make the following recommendations to promote social inclusion in social work regulatory bodies and professional associations and for university faculty. We highlight the need to challenge neoliberal assumptions and priorities.

Regulatory bodies and associations of the profession of social work, for example, the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) and the Ontario Association of Social Workers (OASW), have the power to promote social inclusion for members with disabilities. They should reconsider ableist requirements for practising social work that appear to be based on the perception of disability as an individual deficit. This is evident in the following declaration, required as part of the process of becoming a registered social worker. Applicants must:

> Make a declaration regarding health and conduct so that, based on (their) past and present conduct, the College has reasonable grounds to believe that (they): Do not have any physical or mental condition or disorder that could affect (their) ability to practise social work or social service work in a safe manner. (OCSWSSW, 2023, para. 8)

Many social work scholars have critiqued such practices and policies as these affirm individualism and the medical model of disability, supporting a pejorative understanding of the disabled (Corker, 2000; Hiranandani, 2019; Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 1996; Todd et al., 2019). Social work's regulatory bodies could mandate professional development and training in meaningful social inclusion (e.g., with a disability justice and intersectional concept of disability that confronts prejudices like ableism, sanism, and whiteness). The most recent OCSWSSW (2008) handbook does not identify any such mandate. While OASW's (2021) report highlights the importance of supporting those with mental health disabilities, it fails to include substantial resources related to disability and accessibility on its website. Although the OASW provides online courses and webinars for professional development on its website, a topic on disability and intersectionality is not offered (https://olc.oasw.org).

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) provides a Code of Ethics (CASW, 2005a) and guidelines for ethical practice (CASW, 2005b) for social workers and social service workers. While both use "diversity" as a catchall term, they do not refer to specific types of structural oppression, such as whiteness, sanism, racism, and, importantly in this context, ableism. Social inclusion of service users, social workers, and social service workers would be better served with a recognition of unique needs. The Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) is the accreditation body of social work education. Published accreditation standards in Canada were recently updated to include a recognition of intersectional experiences of oppression, but with only limited recognition of more specific systemic forces such as racism (CASWE, 2021, pp. 15, 16, 20). Despite such gains, the core basis for systemic inequities experienced by intersectional positionalities remains largely absent. As a consequence, anti-oppressive accreditation standards are not always met in a meaningful way, to the detriment of social inclusion in the practice of social work. CASWE could adopt a truly critical structural analysis that specifically targets ableism and incorporates intersectionality, as opposed to what appears to be a tokenistic, individualistic, and neoliberal approach. Another suggestion for CASWE is to stop scheduling annual caucus meetings (race, disability, queer) at the same time, as current practice leads to hard choices for individuals who have intersectional identities to attend one meeting at a time.

Shortcomings on the part of the two regulatory bodies persist, despite progressive, structurally based efforts to enhance social inclusion by CASWE's Persons With Disabilities Caucus. Since 1993, it has advocated for disabled social work students, staff, and faculty, motivated by the understanding that "ableism needs to be acknowledged as part of the anti-oppressive discourse within schools of social work and universities" (Carter et al., 2012, p. 127). Its ongoing efforts have resulted in a specific reference to "disability inclusion" in CASWE's accreditation standards (CASWE, 2021, pp. 6, 7, 19). In addition, as of 2012, after years of effort on the part of the caucus, "all social work schools in Canada were mandated to provide accommodations to students with disabilities and include disability curriculum as a required field of study" (Carter et al., 2012, p. 127).

Neoliberal governments have limited scope and responsibilities in the civic and political arenas, which includes postsecondary institutions. It would be ideal if they could provide more funding related to accessibility. However, this seems like an uphill battle, as many of the challenges faced by Canadian postsecondary institutions can be directly linked to the longstanding neoliberal emphasis on "efficiencies"—in other words, minimal government funding of the public sector, which in turn reduces accessibility for all students.

Canada is a federated state, in which the federal government provides funding to the provincial governments. Each provincial government then provides funding to publicly funded higher education. In recent decades, federal funding to provinces designated for postsecondary education has significantly decreased. In the early 1980s, federal government transfers to postsecondary education made up approximately half of one percent of the GDP. In contrast, in 2021–2022, federal transfers totalled a mere one-fifth of 1%—representing just 0.19% of GDP (CAUT, 2022a). In a separate analysis, federal funding in the late 1970s made up approximately 75% of revenues for Canadian universities, but by late 2010 was less than 50% (CAUT, 2020). Of the 10 Canadian provinces, Ontario provides the least amount of funding for postsecondary education (CAUT, 2022b, 2022c). As a consequence, student-to-faculty ratios are highest in Ontario (CAUT, 2022d). In the context of such austerity, accessibility for people with disabilities (i.e., with a personal deficit) would likely be seen as an "expensive frill."

Thus, neoliberalism has gradually undermined accessibility for faculty with disabilities, and (it could be argued) by extension, for students. Neoliberalism sees "disability (as) an individual impairment, and disabled individuals are responsible for governing themselves such that they conform with normative standards" (Waterfield et al., 2018, p. 337). Within these constraints, improvements should be made. Universities should ensure that a sanctioned, confidential, and relatively uncomplicated process to access disability-related accommodations is openly and readily available. Equity mandates could better address immediate individualized accessibility needs for faculty with disabilities by limiting the need to disclose, which they may perceive as a risk to career advancement, and which typically requires formal documentation.

In contrast, a disability justice lens views faculty with disabilities as legitimate and contributing members of society and strives to reduce and even eliminate external barriers to full participation. Promoting universal accessibility would reduce the need to request accommodations, an attempt to compensate for individual, disability-related deficits. For example, university policies could require that work-related documents, like timesheets, expense sheets, and annual reporting forms, be readily available in accessible formats. Universities could earmark funding for similar accessibility measures within each unit, as opposed to the common practice of sharing an incidental "pot of money" across units and for multiple expenses, such as travel allowances, office space, and teaching assistants (in addition to accessibility). They could mandate training on disability justice and employment equity for faculty and administration, to increase awareness of stigma, dehumanization of people with disabilities, ableism, sanism, and heteronormativity (among other -*isms*). At the same time, advancements in universal accessibility would reduce the need for workplace accommodations as a reactive measure (Black et al., 2015; Vitelli, 2015).

Neoliberal organizational culture governs our behaviours, sets unrealistic timelines, and impacts daily interactions as social work faculty. Postsecondary social work education (faculties and schools across the nation-state) and its manifestation in practice through organizations and services has shifted toward a "management model" of governance (Baines, 2017, p. 57). This model is referred to as new public management (NPM). The lure of NPM lies in its cost-cutting measures and accountability reports. Through NPM, workplaces have become more regimented by making all processes rigid, uniform, and systematic. There is no place left for critical, porous, creative, and flexible nuanced processes and procedures. Such automated bureaucratic processes leave no space for individuals with disabilities to thrive. Seeking out accessibility resources, alternate work arrangements, flexible deadlines, and more time does not fit well within NPM logistics. Disabled staff and faculty that require such measures are marginalized through NPM, and are heralded as troublemakers that are slowing down productive processes (Baines, 2017).

Radian (2017) suggests that, in order to ameliorate the impact of neoliberalism and its NPM spawn, a turn to structural social work (Mullaly, 2007) and how it could impact the processes (procedures) and policies of institutions (i.e., social work regulatory bodies and professional associations and universities) must happen urgently. Radian (2017, p. 96) suggests that structural social work's attention to "the personal is political" can be placed to substantiate the relatedness of everyday experiences of social exclusion embedded in the larger economic, cultural, political, social, and historical structures and ideologies. In this way, faculty and staff with disabilities cannot be scapegoated and blamed for systemic injustices. Radian (2017) discusses that, through individual and collective sharing of social exclusion and inclusion, a lot of the systemic impacts of the aforementioned can be "normalized" across the schools and faculties of social work. In this way, staff and faculty with disabilities can get together to validate each other's experiences and strategize to change policies and procedures in their respective institutions. For example, the lead author recently initiated a "disability committee" of faculty across the nation-state to do just that. The goal of a united faculty with disabilities is to begin to target discriminatory policies and procedures that impact the everyday lives of staff and faculty with disabilities.

7. Conclusion

In this article, two untenured Canadian social work faculty with disabilities provide autoethnographic case studies based on their lived experience of living and working with disabilities at a Canadian university. Critiquing neoliberal policies and practices, the authors made recommendations to improve social inclusion with current constraints of individualism and the personal deficit concept of disability. By drawing on disability justice theory, recommendations were made to initiate structural improvements on the part of the above-mentioned institutions that would reduce the need for reactive adaptation. This work contributes to promoting meaningful and sustainable social inclusion of social work faculty with disabilities.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Performing Agency in Shrinking Spaces: Acting Beyond the Resilience–Resistance Binary

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Abstract

Civil society occupies a significant space in any dynamic political landscape. However, in recent years, governments worldwide have attempted a shift away from activism and advocacy among civil society organisations (CSOs), favouring the apolitical service-driven organisations while disabling those perceived as "political." This process has incapacitated civil society of its political habits, tendencies, and potentials and turned CSOs into infinitely malleable and adaptive subjects, tamed and governed by institutions. Not only has this functioned to create a discursive expansion and valorisation of the concept of "civil society resilience" as an alternative political vision for "resistance," but it has also led to the inclusion of CSOs in the political system on conditions of their exclusion from political participation. Using the case of India as an example of a shrinking welfare state—with its burgeoning poverty, repressed civic space, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) banned, and NGOs abrogated from foreign funding on "anti-national," "anti-developmental" charges—this article captures the rapid symptomatic depoliticisation of civil society, its resource dependency on CSOs, and their potential political exclusion and disengagement. The research builds on a qualitative exploration of the transformative journey of ten highly-influential INGOs in India to offer a distinct perspective toward effecting systemic change by repoliticising CSO resilience as an enhanced strategy of practicing resistance. In doing so, the article bridges the gap between the neoliberal manifestation of resilience and resistance by reconceptualising how and if CSOs co-exist and navigate between competing visions of resilience (as institutionalised subjects of neoliberalism) and resistance (as political subjects of change).

Keywords

civil society; development; politics; exclusion; inclusion; India; neoliberalism; resilience; resistance

Issue

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1. Introduction

Civil society occupies a significant place in any dynamic political landscape. While civic rights organisations have grown significantly over the past several years, these developments have coincided with rapid changes in jurisprudence and legislative reforms driven by neoliberal, nationalist, and neo-colonialist forces (Bruff, 2014; Ismail & Kamat, 2018). Monitoring the civic space, nurturing discontent against a free civil society, or deliberately attempting to restrict its operations have become a global phenomenon extensively debated publicly and across scholarly traditions. However, since the turn of the century, what attracted much scholarly attention is how the pushback trend against civil society that was once prevalent in authoritative regimes, particularly targeted towards those pursuing democracy and right-based agendas, has started to gain momentum in fully consolidated and functional democracies (Aho & Grinde, 2017; Carothers, 2016; Toepler et al., 2020). An increasing number of democratic governments who had previously engaged in rights promotion and protection are now introducing a series of constraints hindering the activities of the civic space. The past decade has reported a considerable backlash against civil society, with more democratic states emulating the footsteps of authoritarianism by introducing restrictive legislations and arbitrary interventions in the civic space

(Clark, 2011; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021). These include violent repression of civic dissent, judicialised bans, administered crackdown and arbitrary interventions on civic spaces, mass vilification of INGOs as "foreign agents," abolition of funds and restrictions on receiving foreign funding, harassment and intimidation of civil rights activists (Carothers, 2016; Froissart, 2014; Lewis, 2013; Mati, 2020; Terwindt & Schliemann, 2017; Toepler et al., 2020). This, alongside the rising "democratic deficit" (Johansson & Kalm, 2016), heavily influenced by a growing array of populism, illiberalism, and the overall ruptures in the fundamentals of politics and development worldwide, has drastically altered the trajectories of state–civil society relations. Academia refers to this phenomenon as the "shrinking space," a metaphor widely embraced to describe a new generation of restrictions on political struggle (Hayes et al., 2017). As the trend unfolds, the wave of autocratization seeks to dismantle the multiple facets of democracy by undermining the space for civic dissent and organised collective action in which civil society worldwide faces systemic efforts to reduce their legitimacy and effectiveness (Brechenmacher, 2017).

The rhetoric and reality describing the belonging or un-belonging of the civil society to the nation-states pertain to questions on the fundamentals of democracy and civic space—its rights, representation, resistance, and justice. However, what makes India a fascinating example of this phenomenon is its reputation of being the largest democracy in the world and a fast-turning "electoral autocracy" (V-Dem Institute, 2021) for vigorously curtailing civil and political rights. In recent years, the landscape of Indian civil society operations has undergone massive transformations driven by the authoritative efforts to produce a single and monolithic narrative of the civil society as apolitical aid-givers of the government. This process has generated a highly fragmented and depoliticised civil society (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015) that is infinitely malleable, adaptive, and constantly in need of reshaping its institutional, administrative, functional, philosophical, and philanthropic propositions in order to be conditionally included in a highly restrictive political space. Not only has it functioned to create a discursive expansion and valorisation of the concept of civil society "resilience" as an alternative political vision for "resistance," but it has also led to the inclusion of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the political system on conditions of their exclusion from political participation (Chandler & Reid, 2016). In drawing out the ontological and epistemological assumptions and their implications vis-à-vis the drive for resilience among civil society, this article captures the paradigm shift taking place in the functional framework of CSOs today vis-à-vis their engagement with the grassroots, particularly in terms of their efforts towards becoming resilient subjects who are more likely to adapt or adjust to the changing demands posed by its environment than resist it. I study the concept of resilience through the lens of governance and governmentality to analyze its entry into the political vocabulary of civil society practices.

The following sections discuss the current demands of reshaping civil society to become more "adaptable" by forgoing its political potentialities, leading to the heightened insecurity among CSOs due to a lack of collective identity, the embedded notion of self-containment, and their struggle for survival. Drawing from Foucauldian works on governmentality (Foucault, 2008, 2010), this article captures what the crackdown on civil society and the effective valorisation of "resilience," as opposed to "resistance," tell us about the current trajectory of state–civil society relations in India. In doing so, it reflects on the neoliberal urge to limit the political horizon of civil society practices and provoke disenchantment with the political itself as an expression of "CSO resilience." Finally, the article demonstrates how the inclusion of civil society within the realm of power and governance is fundamentally structured on the condition of its multi-dimensional exclusion from political power and the struggles taking place within civil society and its endeavours to shift the binary between the institutionalised form of resilience and organised acts of resistance.

2. Research Design

2.1. Contextual Locale: The Case of India

In India, the "conceits of civil society" have emerged vis-à-vis the variegated geographies of fractured sovereignties (Chandhoke, 2003, p. 71). The postcolonial governmental rationalities (Heath & Legg, 2018) concerning the persecution of civic dissent and its "retrospective reflection on colonialism" (Said, 1978, p. 45) emerged alongside the synchronic resurgence of neoliberalisation of the nation-state and its ambiguous relation to global capitalism (Mezzadra et al., 2013). While colonial governance inflicted multiple forms of violence on the colonised subjectivities to incapacitate them from collectively resisting its established governmentality. The postcolonial governmentality, on the contrary, limited the horizon for creating political subjectivities by degrading the idea of politics itself and provoking political disenchantment.

In the first fifty years of Indian independence, the introduction of social development manifesto and implementation of social welfare schemes have been mediated through state–civil society collaborations. The postcolonial predicament unfolds with the introduction of liberalisation, privatisation, globalisation, and multiple structural adjustment programs in India. Post-liberalisation, with the advent of "globalisation and its discontents" (Stiglitz & Pike, 2004, pp. 321–324), (re)territorialisation (Appadurai, 1996) of the Indian nation-state, and rising populism (Basu, 2015) led to constant reproduction of the "postcolonial variegated sovereign" (Ong, 2006, p. 292), rendering political-civic relations further antagonistic. Capital accumulation juxtaposed with exploitation, disenfranchisement, and the silencing of subjects for nationalist and capitalist ambitions turned CSOs into "the missionaries of the corporate world" (Roy, 2016, p. 104). Neoliberalism extends this process of fabrication of civil society into "doing good" as an embedded form of neoliberal governmentality by which governments are pushing for a particular agenda far from giving civil society the power to make informed and agentic decisions. The postcolonial implications of colonial laws of sedition (Sinha, 2019) and the "fear of a foreign hand" (Chandra, 2013) in internal affairs, especially reflected through its judicial-legal frameworks (laws and policies), administrative directives (labelling and institutional narratives), reorientation of social movements, silencing of dissent, and neoliberal promises of development, has further reshaped and compromised the space for civil society activism and advocacy.

In recent years, civil society in India has been subjected to restricted or abolished funding, judicialised bans, and administered crackdowns through arbitrary, illegal, and unconstitutional interventions (Mohan, 2017). The Indian government has introduced several repressive legal frameworks and made amendments to existing policies which further singled out rights-based CSOs on the grounds of national security (Ganguly, 2015). Since 2014, going by the government's own admission, over 20,000 NGOs and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), including reputed human-rights organisations such as Amnesty International, the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundation, Greenpeace, and Compassion International, among notable others (Kumar, 2019), have been blacklisted, abrogated from foreign funding, and banned (partially or completely) from operating in India. Naming international and transnational NGOs a "foreign agent" and shaming them on anti-national and anti-developmental charges has strategically delegitimised INGOs from operating in the country and further widened the cleavage between the Global North and the Global South, hindering their cooperation and interactions.

CSOs advocating for rights promotion and protection are targeted by draconian laws (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020) for alleged non-compliance with norms that in themselves contribute to regulatory ambiguity and fragmentation within the voluntary sector. Furthermore, the existing laws and policies have undergone multiple amendments in recent years, making it even harder for CSOs to ensure compliance due to the lack of an effective system of knowledge generation, training, and awareness of the actual legal provisions. This has triggered the problems of dissonance between competing visions of resilience vs. resistance. CSOs are facing unprecedented challenges in securing regulatory compliance to ensure accountability, which further damages the capabilities of the sector to perform its fundamental duties of democratic deepening. Instead, CSOs are increasingly encouraged to adapt, circumscribe, and abandon their political aspirations—visions, directives, and frameworks—to meet the demands of the government. Such an attempt to pigeonhole civil society based on their political participation (or lack thereof), thereby demarcating limits on their autonomy and agency, makes it imperative to ask what qualifies as "political" and how it interacts with the neoliberal approach to resilience.

3. Data and Methods

This article is a qualitative exploration of an assemblage of ten CSOs (INGOs), their logics and practices characterised by resilience (adaptation) and resistance (friction) in which the dominant hegemony is sometimes supported and at times subverted. The research is influenced by Foucauldian governmentality and Foucault's works on discourse and power to analyse how discourses legitimise and sustain dominant power relations and how subjects may discursively challenge and transform the prevailing hegemony (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010). In building an analysis of resilience in civil society practices, this article interrogates what aspects of civil society's behaviour are constructed and influenced by the neoliberal doctrines of resilience, which are held necessary to respond to the external threats and pressures from the political space.

The method employed for this study is the examination of "actually existing civil society" (Mohan, 2002), the transformative journey of their contested emergence over the past decade (from 2014 up to the present), and their experiential vulnerabilities in the face of government restriction and dominant social and political norms. The empirical material that informs this research was collected over a period of eight months between 2021 and 2022. The data comprise semi-structured interviews with leading representatives from ten INGOs operating in India who are authentic and credible in their actions and considered highly influential in their own rights and vastly diverse in their levels of engagement. The selection strategy serves several analytical purposes as all ten INGOs exhibit variation in their mode of operations, level of outreach, focus, and access to resources while wielding considerable influence on human rights issues concerning international human rights standard settings, rights monitoring, and enforcement. Furthermore, the selected INGOs have a high degree of membership and considerable transnational recognition, which attracts external support across multiple stakeholders and humanitarian networks. In recent years, their work as "watchdogs" and "humanitarian gatekeepers" with particular emphasis on promoting democratic governance and social justice in India has made some of these organisations more susceptible to political violence than others. Therefore, investigating how organisations operating in a similar geo-political environment experience variegated forms of restriction is particularly salient in understanding the effect of internal structure on numerous outcomes, including organisational survival, practices, and impact (see also Scott, 1995).

The interviews were thematically clustered around three core issues, with particular emphasis on understanding how the organisations self-identify themselves (identify "who" they are) and how that shapes their behavioural tendencies and performative outcomes. The interview guide has a narrow thematic focus to primarily examine the organisations' identity based on their predominant ideological positionality and political opinions, that is, if they have a political ideology or lack it (political vs. apolitical). Secondly, we examined the organisations' level of engagement in political participation, collective mobilisation, and how they interact with competing logics and demands from multiple stakeholders (confrontational vs. collaborative). Thirdly, we look at their organisational response strategies and navigating techniques, as situated under the category of impact assessment and risk evaluation (risk-takers vs. careful manoeuvrers).

Given the sensitivity of the current political situation in India—and to avoid the risk of identity disclosure—organisations selected for this case study and individual informants are not mentioned by name. The data analysis is based on a collective case study of ten highly-influential INGOs operating in India based on their nearly perfect fit to one of the three organisational types derived from their primary domain of action and engagement. Participants were chosen to elicit broad-based knowledge of selection (see Table 1). They include current and former members of executive management, program and policy advisors, and deputy directors. The fieldwork was conducted in two phases: The first half took place in India over five months between March 2021 and July 2021, in which in-person interviews were the method of choice, followed by a Covid-19-led transition to using virtual platforms (Zoom, in particular) as the primary source for data generation.

4. The Neoliberal Logic of Civil Society Resilience in India

Resilience, as propounded by neoliberal rationalities, is a fast-becoming "key term of art for neoliberal regimes of governance" that people and individuals worldwide must possess to become whole and developed subjects (Reid, 2013, p. 6). Neoliberalism is widely understood as a theory of political economic practices proposing that maximising entrepreneurial freedoms can best advance human well-being within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade (Harvey, 2007, p. 22, as cited in Chandler & Reid, 2016, p. 74). The condition of resilience as an expression of neoliberalism is based upon a fundamental rejection of the subject's unique capacity to reason and knowledge, and their potential to make autonomous and independent decisions. Instead, the making of resilient subjects within the doctrine of neoliberalism requires them to be in a permanent state of adaptation which implies political passivity, de-subjectification, and constant reshaping of the self to adapt to its enabling conditions by embracing insecurity and accepting its inability to resist (Chandler & Reid, 2016; Mezzadra et al., 2013). In other words, comprehending how resilience functions in creating a reflexive model that enables subjects to react to external threats and pressures (Gunderson, 2003) requires us to examine its constitutive function of making subjects capable of adapting to radical uncertainty (O'Malley, 2010). This study approaches the concept of resilience as a new form of neoliberal governmentality and conceptualises it in relation to a set of civil society practices that explain why the logic of resilience emphasises the responsibility of the subjectivities to govern themselves most appropriately.

In its essence, the existence of civil society within the neoliberal governmentality has primarily taken shape around the discourse on "development" used by governments to legitimise their right to exercise governmental technologies on their citizens, ostensibly in order to develop them. The Indian government has been utilising development doctrines to proliferate and feed their hegemonic political imaginary, coupled with systemic depoliticisation of civil society space (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015), to naturalise the neoliberal framework of governance. The correlation between propagating

Table 1. Anonymised list of interview participants.

Organisational type	No. of organisations	Interviewees (with designation)
Humanitarian aid/Service delivery (HASD)	Three	HASD 1: Senior policy advisor HASD 2: Managing director HASD 3: Associate director
Health, education, and environment protection (HEEP)	Three	HEEP 1: Executive member HEEP 2: Deputy director HEEP 3: Divisional director for program
Human rights and democracy promotion (HRDP)	Four	HRDP 1: Senior policy advisor HRDP 2: Executive director (CEO) HRDP 3: Unit director HRDP 4: Senior policy advisor

development doctrines and the neoliberal attempt to attend to the forms of subjectivities it attempts to bring into being, where subjectivities are "self-made and being-made" (Foucault, 2010, p. 12), and regulated and appropriated by the institutions that govern them, seems to be foundational to the neoliberal logic of resilience in India. In the continuum of resilience, the government is constructing a sphere of governance that forces civil society to self-censor their activities (Terwindt & Schliemann, 2017), adopt various shielding strategies, and reorient their agenda from advocacy to service delivery (Broeckhoven et al., 2020). For Foucault (2008), *laissez-faire* governance based on liberal political economy finds its best expression in regulating civil society. Although the state that must not "govern too much" is legitimised through the liberal principles of modernity, real governance happens through active intervention in civil society operations that opens up a new logic of discipline and control (see also Foucault, 2010). In the neoliberal discourse of resilience, civil society assumes a more proactive engagement with the government by being "accountable" to the nation-state and "regulated" by their global partners while being "efficient" in dealing with a crisis (Mitlin, 2008). To a certain extent, this trend represents a popular discursive framework that defines social-sector engagement and social work institutions in India (Chandhoke, 2003). The neoliberal manifestations of CSOs are heavily regulated and governed by the extensive bureaucratic tentacles of the governing bodies within which they operate, and their accountability lies with the donor agencies for funds and sustenance. Such rapid depoliticisation of civil society's engagement and intervention has generated a highly fragmented and adaptive civil society, either compensating for the dysfunctionality of the government or acting as an extension of neoliberal governmentality.

This etymology is suggestive of the shifting governing rationalities and their assumed functional dichotomisation of CSOs into political (as advocacy) vs. apolitical (as developmental). However, understanding the resilience of civil society through its coping capacity and potential to adapt to the conflicting interests and demands of various stakeholders as "an element of transactional reality in the history of governmental technologies" (Foucault, 2008, p. 297) oversimplifies the complexities of neoliberal resilience and its strategic depoliticisation of the subjectivities. The resurgence of neoliberal framing of resilience in the institutional approach to organisational studies has focused on the need for organisations to develop the faculties of resilience and adaptive efficiency to enhance capabilities, resource accessibility, and professional productivity. In effect, the neoliberal aspiration to form new public management programs has diminished the normative values and political potentials of CSOs and reduced their contribution to community resilience into quantifiable numbers measured through annual reports and spreadsheets (Carothers, 2016). This has transformed the operative framework of CSOs as apolitical service providers, providing social assistance without directly influencing the broader polity, and their beneficiaries turned into customers receiving welfare as incentives to further enable their adaptive capacities. The potentially devastating effect of this shift turns civil society into a neoliberal subject of institutional resilience that continues to have political aspirations for a just and equitable future, while its practice and praxis become apolitical and adaptive to the will of the government (Froissart, 2014). This turn from the "political" to the "developmental" has problematised civil society's scope and the extent of its democratic engagement, its potential to counter-conduct (Foucault, 2007), thus reinforcing the systemic and structural asymmetries of the neoliberal systems of governance and institutions. In the critical language of Foucauldian analysis of power, he claims that neoliberal governmentality is inseparable from and exists within the realm of power relations (Foucault, 2008). The neoliberal regimes of governance constantly evolve by integrating conflicting ideas and interests of multiple stakeholders in society. In doing so, it absorbs and diffuses any acts of resistance by appropriating and even hybridising itself to stay in control of the development-power nexus to govern the subjectivities. This makes development a political process insofar as it involves allocating resources that generate power relations between the caregiver and the beneficiary (Mati, 2020). Thus, civil society involved in developmental activities is neither devoid of politics nor stands immune to power relations. Neoliberal governmental rationality, through its indefinite state of exception, reproduces itself through different exclusionary practices and situated acts of subjugation, surveillance, and institutional resilience to live up to its political promise of development. The discursive space of social inclusion offers an "alternative political engagement" and a "development alternative" instead of an alternative to the development itself (McFarlane, 2004, pp. 890–916). This neoliberal effort of depoliticising development (Mezzadra et al., 2013) has been of fundamental significance to the growth of resilience as a discursive framework that glorifies "the imperative of adaptation rather than resistance to change" (Handmer & Dovers, 1996, p. 483). Building an apolitical and adaptive civil society, thus, implies CSOs being in a permanent state of adjustment (principally that of resilience) and accepting the deliberate disabling of their political habits and potentials through the choices and behavioural agency of civil society itself.

5. Inclusion Through Exclusion

The profound paradox that undercuts the entire liberal project is its capacity to broaden the parameters of social inclusion and exclusion, whereby conditional inclusion of the dis-appropriated subjects takes place through the coercive exclusion of the "political" in them, which is inherently bound to the social fabric that foregrounds the significance of civil society's existence. The neoliberal governing rationality creates variegated possibilities and conditions for inclusion and exclusion that emerge as a new site for political negotiation, thereby reshaping the civil society landscape. This correlates to the neoliberal strategy of "inclusion through exclusion" by which the inclusion of civil society within the political space is fundamentally structured on conditions of its exclusion from political participation. By this logic, the inclusion and exclusion of civil society within the political space can be interpreted as informed and reinforced by its degree of adaptation to and acceptance of existing social norms and policies as propagated by the neoliberal governing rationalities. Here, inclusion/exclusion is taken from a macro socio-economic context and seen as a question of civil society's political participation and choice-making capabilities.

Interviews with leading representatives of four out of ten INGOs selected for the case study, specifically those fitting the humanitarian aid/service delivery (HASD) and the health, education, and environment protection (HEEP) organisational type, reflect a vivid fragmentation among civil society practices that allows engagement in welfare provision but disallows political participation. During interviews, although respondents held strong political opinions and showed sentiments of frustration with the current government, however, on directly questioning their predominant ideological positionality and political opinions as an organisation, they answered in somewhat ambiguous ways expressing a politically impartial/neutral take on things. At the same time, they fully comprehended the volatility of the current political space and their own vulnerabilities:

> The biggest issue for the NGO community in India has been the same thing from day one—whether to ask political questions or not….We have argued over that for donkey's years. Talking about problems is becoming politically incorrect these days and could get you blacklisted. This is a serious problem, and this is dangerous to all NGOs that are trying to point out errors, or asking difficult questions to the country's "supreme leader" [Prime Minister Modi as referred to by state-sponsored media houses]. The space for dissent in India today has shrunk tremendously. We are simply not allowed to ask questions. That's the reality of where we are headed, and that we need to accept. (HEEP III, interview)

> We are working under enormous pressure, and there's been constant cumulative efforts to scale down our work and reduce our presence in the sector. If you got no resources and funds to sustain, at one point, you are certain to hit bottom from where it is impossible to go on. So as much as we like to plan out things our way, we need to consider the aspect of partnership and who we can collaborate with….The question is not always about what is right, but about what is achievable at this point, and who does it benefit. What is negotiable, and what is absolutely beyond compromise? That's everything we are about, finding the balance between accountability and quality. We are well aware of the risks in such collaborations, but our organisation excels at playing the game by the book. (HEEP I, interview)

These statements open up the black box of conflicting interests and logic formations produced in the form of exclusionary inclusion of civil society within the political system. They highlight the emergence of a consensus within the larger civic space which conforms that NGO credibility is determined by its inclusiveness to the institutionalised norms of governance. At the same time, civil society remains superfluous, continuously adjusting and adapting to new ideas, practices, and actions which produces a fluid effect. This fluid or adaptive nature of civil society essentially disallows the possibility for organised acts of resistance that could serve as a mechanism for "counter-conduct." At the same time, the CSOs struggle to address the paradox of their own exclusion in political participation by being an adaptive subject while comprehending the material and ideological conditions of their inclusion.

Following the Foucauldian analysis of "discursive formations" (Foucault, 1972), which lead to the production of particular statements that control what can and cannot be linguistically expressed, talked about, and practiced—the NGOs occupy a complicated space in neoliberal politics. Foucault famously argued that "nothing has any meaning outside of discourse" (Foucault, 1972, p. 45) and power is fundamental to Foucauldian understanding of discourse. Therefore, if power holds the capacity to legitimise the delegitimisation of those perceived as a threat to its own position of authority, the legitimacy of civil society rests on its ability to correlate practices that serve as an extension of governmental values and ambitions. The perception of civil society as shaped by governing rationalities determines what could be considered legitimate behaviour and how an admissible civil society should act. In this sense, the CSOs willingly conforming to the governmental decisions and cooperating to participate in self-governance will most likely attain their goal of "earning" legitimacy from the state, unlike those monitoring and advocating for rights will face assured coercion and delegitimisation for having conflicting interests than the government. This allows us to further recognise how the relationship between the state and civil society keeps oscillating between dominant modes of control, i.e., coercion or consent (Gramsci, 1971; Mati, 2020), in which the hegemony of the state is continually renewed, reproduced, and institutionally inscribed.

One senior policy official from the human rights and democracy promotion (HRDP) organisational type, and involved in their organisation's agenda-setting, recalled that the risk of selecting a politically sensitive issue "to an astonishing level depends on the government's own perception of threat. We need to make an informed evaluation of risks and severity that could certainly weigh into the choices we make in selecting an agenda."

Another primary concern for officials from the HRDP organisational type was the potential loss of funds and resource dependence among NGOs:

> We cannot downplay India's lack of a robust philanthropic culture. So, coming at a clash with the government means not only placing our funding streams at risk but also damaging our organisation's reputation and support system by alienating potential foreign donors. (HRDP II, interview)
>
> Suppose the donor has a particular agenda in mind regarding where the money should be spent. In that case, that decision needs to be considered over our mission logic, and the money is used for the purpose they [donors] have specified. They tend to engage with issues that are popularly discussed across the state-owned media houses and want quick and measurable impact for their money. We like to select issues that are silenced and ignored. Our volunteers have been lobbying with the government on particular rights issues for years and sometimes decades. That's the difference. This is a very paradoxical situation. (HRDP I, interview)

The immediate sense of these quotes identifies two mechanisms that capture the aspect of resource dependency among NGOs and the paradox of neoliberal governmentality, which seeks to govern subjectivities through economic surveillance. First, the government can discipline NGO activities and control their access to vital resources via implicit or explicit threats to withdraw funding should the organisation become political (Bloodgood & Tremblay-Boire, 2017; Ruggiano & Taliaferro, 2012). Second, they illustrate how disembedding the domain of "political" from the socio-economic conventions of civil society is precisely the condition of their social inclusion, whereby the government might regulate and control the economy—unavailability of resources, curb funds, a ban on operations—to reinvigorate the adaptive capacities among subjectivities and intimidate them into submission. The state, as a resource provider, can deter NGO advocacy (Li et al., 2017) as much as it could restrict the flow of resources and funds made available to the NGOs as part of international solidarity through laws and policy transfers that are designed to stifle the voice of civil society (Amnesty International, 2019). Therefore, NGOs operating in a constrained political environment need to secure external funding sources to survive and sustain their operations while carefully transforming their activities from "confrontational to palliative" (Jalali, 2013) to reduce the risk of a political crackdown by the government (Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012). This explains what is at stake in the neoliberal discourse of resilience, in which "to be resilient is to forego the very power of resistance and accept one's vulnerability to that which threatens" (Reid, 2013, p. 360). At the same time, those being governed entirely comprehend their vulnerability and lack of subjective choice-making capabilities, thus, explaining the spatial and temporal limits to civil society's political existence.

6. Repoliticizing Resilience: Creating Space for Activism

There is a growing consensus among scholars that a resilience approach to CSO practices runs the risk of striking an over-optimistic tone regarding local capacities to overcome and adjust to complexities in their outer environment while pushing for a dehumanising political agenda and the continuity of the state's dominance (Chandler, 2015; Duffield, 2012; Walker & Cooper, 2011). Resilience as a "rolling-out neoliberal governmentality" (Joseph, 2013, p. 51) demands subjectivities "to live up to their responsibilities by accepting the conditions of their own vulnerability" (Evans & Reid, 2013, p. 96). The neoliberal strategy of generating "resilience" through development agencies, particularly civil society interventions, shifts the burden of development from the state to the people (Duffield, 2012). This allows temporary empowerment by making resources available for consumption by maximising entrepreneurial freedom within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, free trade, and individual liberty (Harvey, 2016). The neoliberal model of resilience has turned CSOs into apolitical and adaptive subjects, tamed and governed by institutions (Baker, 1999). A resilient civil society cannot "conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility" (Evans & Reid, 2013, p. 83), as they are busy accommodating themselves within the existing worldview, changing their desires and expectations to fit in.

However, understanding civil resilience as a neoliberal doctrine that forces its subjectivities to become active participants in their own depoliticisation where the resilient subject has "accepted the imperative not to resist" (Evans & Reid, 2013, p. 85) oversimplifies and overlooks the relational dependence of resistance upon resilience by reducing them to being adaptive vs. non-adaptive. This artificial binary results from competing visions of resilience and resistance as mutually opposing, wherein resilience demands apolitical adaptation and compliance to their attendant governmentality. In contrast, resistance is perceived as a medium for revolutionary change that incites political intervention and civil participation by which politics regains its material dimensions. While civil society's symptomatic adaptation and coping mechanisms may be seen as its effort toward "resilience-building," it can pose differential challenges and possibilities for civil society to operate within and engage with diverse and conflicting interests of varied stakeholders.

Drawing from the empirical evidence revealed by the Indian civil society captures the political deployment of "performativity" as an analytical bridge that binds the resilience-resistance nexus where resilience subsumes resistance. In the context of civil resistance movements in India, practising resilience becomes the mode for resistance that enables operating between "external control and organisational autonomy" (Arvidson & Linde, 2021, p. 208) by opening up space for transformations that are intimately tied to the policy and practice mechanisms. From the interviews:

> Our motto is to bring change on a systemic level. We also don't believe that change is going to come from any one organisation or one person, it requires a social movement. Our task is to bring problematic issues to the limelight, and we speak about those issues on behalf of thousands of millions of Indian citizens in which our role is to catalyse change, and we are willing to engage with everyone to do so, including the government and corporations as long as they are willing to look beyond their own interests and are eager to fix things. (HEEP II)

> Our organisation puts a lot of value on setting the right goals that we can look back at in five to ten years as a success strategy. Right now, the political climate is too sensitive to be seen as politically advocating for big policy changes concerning poverty reduction, ecological extraction and degradation, displacement, and forced migration. It's like fighting in the fog, where you cannot predict what could go wrong. So we have started operating at the intersection of advocacy-on-alert and active service delivery. Our expert affiliates constantly lobby with the government and big donors to curate a strategy we can make the most out of. (HEEP III)

Resilience, as demonstrated by the Indian civil society, attempts to manoeuvre and navigate exogenic challenges by implementing various adaptation and mitigation techniques, shielding strategies, reorientation of their agenda from "advocacy-on-alert" to service delivery, and enhancing aspects of transparency, accountability, and performance across transnational civil society networks. This process is highly suggestive of the current shift in civil society practices, whereby CSOs comprehend the struggles for political and democratic transformations and are engaged in (internally) decoupling actions from the institutional structure to maintain their credibility. Here the concept of resilience becomes a performative process by which civil society revisits its own tendency of submitting to the state of adaptation, dealing with the question of its own systemic depoliticisation, destabilisation, insecurities, and passive participation in the "political society" to revitalise its strength and potential to change. It unpacks a broader dimension to resilience thinking that transcends beyond the institutionalising effects of self-discipline and serves as a more powerful medium for effecting systemic political change.

Two INGO leading activists who have been collectively engaged with the rights and service sectors for over two decades expressed hope that the ongoing struggles, bargaining, and negotiations with multiple stakeholders' logic would alter the existing political dynamic:

> Human rights issues are personal. To our members and affiliates, it is more than just an issue they work for. It is something they care about deeply. We have been publicly shamed and vilified, and our activists have been put behind bars, harassed, and intimidated. Our funds are restricted. In the past, we have attracted a lot of media visibility for campaigning against some serious human rights violations in the country. If there is something we could add value to, something that delivers human rights impact, we have the courage to act. And the fact that even though we are hounded by the state and big businesses but not hounded off the political scene gives us the confidence and credibility to go on. (HRDP III, interview)

> We are being demonised for doing charity. It's excruciating how there is a growing dislike for international organisations as India is trying to uphold its primordial identity as a Hindu nationalist nation. Our intervention on humanitarian causes concerning discrimination against minority women and children, Dalit and Tribal populations are being framed as political and divisive. But we have a spiritual commitment to our vision and, luckily, the support of a bunch of transnational donors who have the best interest at heart and the utmost faith in our values....This is a tough fight, but giving up is not an option here. (HASD II, interview)

These experiential vulnerabilities among CSOs and their exhibition of tremendous commitment and courage towards upholding their values as social work institutions amidst complexities of violence and arbitrary interventions capture the resilience of civil society as a dynamic and integrated process of their survival strategy. It is influenced by multiple discursive and contextual factors wherein resilience is about adaptation and maintaining the existing status quo as much as it facilitates the employment of powerful tools that create grounds for active resistance. It encapsulates how civil society might not necessarily be at the receiving end of institutional politics. Instead, the knowledge of resilience can be practiced and reproduced by CSOs to survive beyond the institutionalised modes of governance. Enacting resilience practices while operating in a contentious status quo that necessitates the adaptation of newer frameworks of multilateral accountability reflects an inherently political strategy. Here, the knowledge of their own subjugation and adjustments to the existing power relations becomes "a tactical choice born of prudent awareness of the balance of power" (Scott, 1995, p. 183), which transcends a singular logic of adaptation and may act as a precursor for an enhanced strategy for resistance wherein resilience becomes a condition for resistance. Therefore, resilience, when brought under neoliberal governmentality through economically rationalised disciplinary interventions, seeks to police, regulate, and control the subjectivities. However, the resilient subjectivities on fully comprehending the volatility of the situation and their own vulnerabilities to call for active resistance has a larger potential for initiating effective re-politicisation as a response to institutionalised depoliticisation. In this sense, resilience could also mean a capacity embedded in human nature that enables them to anticipate and respond to complex situations while creating the possibilities to incite popular resistance that emerges out of the regulatory state of adaptation, thus, making re-politicisation possible (as seen in Figure 1). Here, the process of politicisation, depoliticisation, and re-politicisation becomes part of a continuum that emerges in relation to the transformations in state–society relationships. Therefore, the political acts of resistance could emerge out of, rather than operating outside, the limits of resilience. The strategy of practicing resistance can be envisioned by reconciling the knowledge of resilience to invoke change and incite collective mobilization, thus creating a new field of political intervention.

Despite the persistent and systemic efforts to undermine free civic space and depoliticise social work practices, the last decade in India saw powerful anti-establishment protests and social movements led by CSOs demanding social justice, rights, and equality. CSOs are increasingly embracing resilience thinking as a more iterative approach that is derived inductively to shape, evolve and reevaluate the civil society's engagement with competing logic and interests from multiple stakeholders, as well as adopting a "strategies-as-practice" approach (Jarzabkowski, 2004) to influence and alter the existing institutional order, which is precisely an act of showing resistance against institutionalised control.

7. Conclusions

The task of renovating the "political" in the "civil" requires a fundamental shift away from the biopolitical dependence on development. More specifically, the corporatised understanding of development as an apolitical project-based process concerned with building resilient subjects that need technological knowledge, ample resources, and tailor-made professionals to achieve pre-set goals and agendas—is an inherently flawed perception of development as promoted and propagated by the neoliberal governmentality. When these highly calculated and polished designs/strategies meet the complex societal and cultural contours, it widens the cleavage between intentions and outcomes. As Ferguson (1994, p. 17) said:

> Whatever interests may be at work, and whatever they [development practitioners] may think they are doing, they can only operate through a complex set of social and cultural structures so deeply embedded and so ill-perceived that the outcome may be only a baroque and unrecognisable transformation of the original intention.

Governmentality acting as a tool to the neoliberal market forces intimidate its subjects into a state of submission. These newly formed subjectivities are disabled of their political habits, potentials, and tendencies to resist societal odds. Instead, they are framed within the mindset of adaptation, constantly re-adjusting their needs in the face of everyday injustices. Ultimately, "development has always been about changing the people so that they can be brought into the system instead of changing the system itself" (Darby, 2009, p. 705). Therefore, it is crucial to recognise the tools and tactics of neoliberal resilience within the broader context of depoliticised activism and the related shift away from "government to governance" (Rhodes, 1997) that has led to

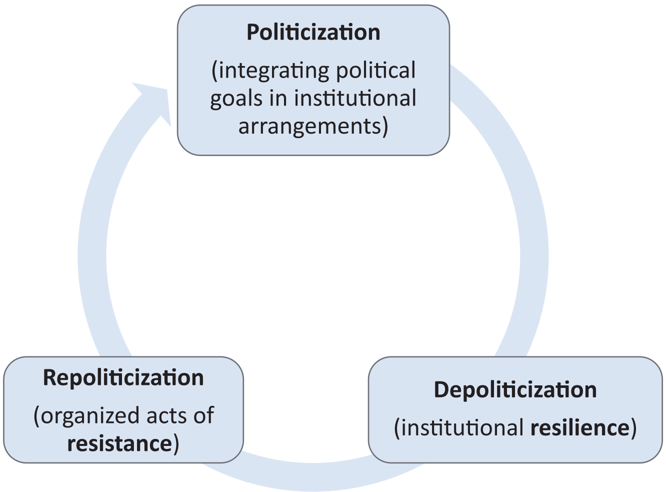

Figure 1. Resilience–resistance nexus in politicisation processes.

the permeation of neoliberal logic of governance within political systems and institutions.

The civil society-organised collective mobilisation and capacity building are being replaced by the neoliberal model of resilience, whereby accepting the necessity of adaptation to the realities has become an endemic condition for development (Chandler & Reid, 2016). In this sense, understanding neoliberal resilience as one of systemic adaptation implies the strength to withstand exogenous shocks as much as it runs the risk of misinterpreting resilient subjects as "adapt and capable in their dealings with the world" (Chandler, 2015, p. 30), leading the way for "taken-for-grantedness" whereby the needs and demands of resilient subjectivities are constantly negotiated and often unheard. Therefore, resisting neoliberal governmentality in the postcolonial present requires rejecting the development alternatives that intensify the socio-economic vulnerabilities with the political promise of resilience and refocusing our attention on the resilience-resistance nexus and its interaction with the emerging modes of governance and the contemporary forms of anti-politics that neoliberalism demands. To repoliticise, the act of resilience requires reinvestment in manifesting political subjectivities by deploying new political strategies that revitalise and recover their capacity to think and act politically and to resist, subvert, escape, and defy the imposition of the exclusionary modes of power and governance that neoliberal regimes insist on.

Despite multiple attempts to streamline and improve the relationship between the Indian state and civil society, many challenges remain, including a feeling of mutual distrust and hostility, a lack of shared understanding of their roles in social transformation and in addressing crucial issues concerning the fundamentals of democracy, social inclusion, rights, and justice. As Hulme and Edwards (1997, p. 23) point out, civil society today is inherently inconsistent in performing operations that claim to promote qualitative change because "it is not about what is included, but rather about what is excluded by their model, and particularly its impact on the capacity of poor people to organise themselves independently of vested interests and structural inequalities." Therefore, it is essential to identify and address these gaps to enable CSOs to contribute more meaningfully to a politically and socially vibrant democratic society. At this critical juncture when democratic principles are increasingly threatened by the endorsement of a politically disenchanted civil society that could otherwise represent the value of the Indian secular democracy and its inclusivity within the political-economic context, civil society must engage with the question of its own systemic depoliticisation.

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Article

<O/ No Power but Deaf Power \O>: Revitalizing Deaf Education Systems via Anarchism

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Abstract

Deaf education is an incoherent macrosystem whose sub-systems—e.g., biomedical vs. sociocultural institutions—contradict. Unreconciled tensions cause stagnation, not regeneration, and harmful dissensus in deaf educational sub-systems. To revitalize deaf education, address these contradictions, and eliminate incoherence, we posit that a deaf-led systemic transformation of deaf education is necessary; furthermore, we argue it may best be realized through theories and actions constitutive of anarchism. To this end, we synthesize four thematic loci where anarchism overtly aligns with constructs immanent in deaf communities. First, collectivism is necessary for survival in anarchist and deaf communities toward shared goals including equity in education, social labor, and politics. Second, mutual aid is integral—like anarchists who work arm-in-arm, deaf individuals and groups exhibit uncanny solidarity across political, cultural, technological, linguistic, and geographical boundaries. Third, direct action tactics overlap in both groups: When facing internal or external threats, both communities effectively rally local mechanisms to affect change. Finally, both groups exhibit a stubborn, existential refusal to be subdued or ruled by outsiders. Reframing systemic dilemmas in deaf education via anarchism is a novel, beneficial praxis that's only been tangentially explored. Centering anarchism in deaf education also generates succor for ongoing struggles about sign language in deaf communities. Toward the horizon of radical equality, our staunchly anarchist analysis of deaf education argues that to guide deaf-positive system change neoliberalism is inert and neo-fascism anathema.

Keywords

anarchist studies; anarchism; deaf education; deaf studies; democracy and dissensus; disability studies

Issue

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1. Deaf Education: A History of Harm and Conflict

Conflict defines deaf education (Scouten, 1984). Deaf education is a macrosystem consisting of interconnected but conflicting subsystems focused on biology, culture, language, technology, power, and politics (Bauman & Murray, 2014; Leigh & Andrews, 2017). Presently, deaf research, including deaf studies on pedagogy, sign language linguistics, health literacy, and so on, exhibits generalized incoherence and contradictory goals (Foster, 2001; Lane, 2008). This dissensus about deafness may avail new lines of thought, but often causes harm (Skyer, 2021a).

Historically, deaf education was controlled—but not without fierce resistance—by nondeaf outsiders (Dye & Terhune-Cotter, 2021; Greenwald, 2021). Problematic aspects of incoherent deaf education systems are located precisely in this nondeaf hegemony. Juxtaposing biomedical and sociocultural stances is revealing. First, biomedical views—reproduced uncritically in medical settings, hospitals, and clinics—generally posit that deafness is a scourge to be eliminated (Mauldin, 2016; Valente & Boldt, 2016). In opposition, sociocultural stances critically respond to injustice and center the activism of enclaves of self-determined deaf people (Mauldin & Fannon, 2017; Skyer, 2022). While biomedicine may dehumanize, socioculturalists posit that deafness is a testament to and a wellspring of human resilience and creativity (Bauman & Murray, 2014; Vygotsky, 1993).

We must be entirely clear about our values from the start: Deaf people have inviolable merit. Deaf people hold an inalienable right to agency, autonomy, and sovereignty in educational decision-making (NDC, 2020; Skyer, 2021b). This suite of rights supersedes deaf education; however, our focus is purposeful. Deaf education represents in microcosm a totalizing superstructure and point of inflection for other biological, social, political, linguistic, and cultural struggles. While the sources of antideaf harms change, the threats—from language deprivation to intersectional oppression—are widespread and constant (Glickman & Hall, 2018; Greenwald, 2021; Hiddinga et al., 2020; Moges-Riedel et al., 2020; Virdi, 2020).

Antideaf harm is universally problematic. It is especially egregious perpetuated against the vulnerable, including frighteningly-commonplace harms against deaf people who are (singly or in combination) very young, very old, newly identified, multiply disabled, or reside in precarious socio-economic/geo-political contexts (Friedner, 2017; Humphries et al., 2012). One study quantified the harms done by mainstream education against deaf children by measuring cortisol—a biomarker for stress and inflammation (Bess et al., 2016). When researchers collected saliva samples from school-aged deaf children, they found extraordinary volumes of cortisol. The researchers state: Deaf youngsters "experience increased vigilance…fatigue, loss of energy, and poor coping skills" (Bess et al., 2016, pp. 1–2). These deaf children awake in extreme anxiety and exhibit adrenal cortex dysregulation on par with adults suffering from burnout syndrome. While this evidence is (literally) microscopic, it suggests wider dilemmas.

2. Justification for Transforming Deaf Systems Concerning Unjustifiable Hierarchies

We believe nothing short of a deaf-led revolution of deaf education is necessary to uproot nondeaf hegemony, address systemic incoherence, and eliminate major sources of harm. Deaf people and deaf communities, we assert, ought to have sovereign power to determine operations in deaf education sub/systems. Despite our assertions, deaf people's lifeways operate constantly under threat of social isolation and cultural dislocation at every educational stage, in every model of implementation, from early intervention to deaf elder care (Chua et al., 2022; Henner et al., 2021; Hiddinga et al., 2020).

Unreconciled dilemmas harm deaf people (Skyer, 2021b). Conflicts about deaf languages—including if families and schools should use spoken languages, signed languages, or artificial sign systems—are a metonym for generalized political struggle (Scott & Dostal, 2019; Scott & Henner, 2021). These dilemmas about language intersect power, knowledge, and values, centered on an analysis about *whose* axiological framework is considered authoritative, and whose is subordinated (Snoddon & Weber, 2021). A hypothetical question might ask: Does "normalcy" supersede "divergence" in importance? (Davis, 1995, 2013). The basic question that links authority, knowledge, and values about deafness is also posed in domains about auditory technologies, representing in proxy another fight for deaf people's rights, including bodily and mental autonomy (Aldersley, 2002; Scott et al., 2019).

Given harms and threats, it's justifiable that deaf people worldwide consider themselves besieged. Deaf people often find themselves in antagonistic relations with socio-political forces appearing more powerful than small but diverse deaf populations (Ladd, 2003; Luckner, 2018). It's justifiable that deaf people need and desire not only effective mechanisms for *resisting* harms but also effective mechanisms for *supplanting* harm with conditions that foster flourishing (De Clerck, 2019; Skyer, 2023b).

2.1. An Anarchist-Informed Theory of Deaf Power

Our stated goal is to bring about a deaf-led system change in deaf education by inverting the historical power dynamic that has harmed countless deaf people for centuries. This approach to "deaf power" is also reflected in the emoticons of our title, which graphically show an internationally-recognized sign language utterance for the same phrase, where one hand covers an ear and the other is raised in protest. Next, we explore a similar but anarchist-informed theory of power in deaf education about a nexus of four dialectical concepts that require explicit analysis (Vygotsky, 1993).

First, we examine two oppositional theories about structures of deaf power: (a) *hierarchies*, i.e., top-down structures of system control, and (b) *heterarchies*, equitable networks of shared responsibility (Skyer & Cochell, 2020). Hierarchies and heterarchies are both widespread in deaf education systems. Hierarchies and heterarchies may each lead to harm or benefit, depending on the persons involved, their motives, and justifications for action (Chomsky, 2013). As we show, nondeaf hegemony is seldom justifiable because coercion by a nondeaf power-elite very often results in harms against deaf people (Skyer, 2021b). In strong contrast, Deaf Culture is usually described as collectivist (Grushkin & Brockway, 2020). In this heterarchical ordering, the deaf group's success is paramount. This set of heterarchical values differently configures deaf educational classroom interactions and other social interactions in Deaf Culture.

Anarchists hold that hierarchies are generally coercive and thus seldom justifiable (Chomsky, 2013; Kropotkin, 1912/1964). While anarchism presupposes suspicion of all hierarchies, we are specifically suspicious of educational hierarchies that may be unacknowledged sources of harm. Cherryholmes (1999) for example, questions Bloom's taxonomy and undermines its commitment to the "operative assumption that scientific [knowledge is] hierarchical" (p. 12). While Bloom enjoys widespread influence in (deaf) education, under close analysis, his tenets are problematic. As Cherryholmes lays bare: There is no *one* knowledge that is legitimate and supersedes all others. In deaf education, this requires (at minimum) adjoining generic knowledge about teaching and learning with deaf educational epistemologies (Kusters, 2017).

Second, we propose that (c) *autonomy*, that is, independent, uncoerced decision-making, and (d) *intact communities* founded on interdependent decision-making are complementary social forces. Generally, deaf people are members of at least two major groups: majority-nondeaf societies and minority Deaf Cultures. In response to nondeaf majoritarianism, deaf people coalesce, pool scarce resources, and share power among one another. The desire by deaf persons to be self-determined as individuals is not at odds with the desire for there to be diverse deaf communities. Any community is, by definition, a group of individuals making choices jointly. Similarly, Indigenous scholars demonstrate that self- and community-actualization are mutually constituting forces (Blackstock, 2014). Maslow's appropriated hierarchy of needs distorts the Blackfoot Nations' tribal ideology; it wrongly opposes the needs and goals of individuals with those of social groups (Michel, 2014; Safir, 2020). We reject the idea that communitarian and self-directed decision-making are oppositional. Furthermore, we think deaf self-actualization is enabled by prior-existing social cohesion and dependent on deaf community-actualization.

In connection, deaf people worldwide often self-identify with intersectional perspectives, this is because deaf people often belong to more than one minority community and these forms of oppression often interlock. Deaf people who are *also* disabled or Black, Indigenous, brown, or persons of color (BIPOC) may experience multiple forms of oppression that are interconnected, including when racialized identities or cultures intersect with deafness (Moges-Riedel et al., 2020). Effective praxis at this juncture requires collaboration in the form of heterarchy, and the deft unification of autonomy and community.

Our anarchist stance suggests that in deaf communities, autonomy and community decision-making are mutually-constitutive and may be an effective means to subvert nondeaf majoritarianism and uproot sources of intersectional harm. Likewise, anarchists and other radical deaf liberation theorists affirm that rejecting audism and eliminating racism, requires interrogating their commonalities in ableism (Lawyer, 2018; Stapleton, 2016; Yancey, 2023). Likewise, we reject all other systematic *-isms* in deaf education, including the ageism that positions deaf children as "lesser" decision-makers or as lacking knowledge—this and other *-isms* are often exploited as justifications for antideaf coercion in schools.

2.2. Authorial Positionality

Writing this article, we attempted to praxis what we preach. Here, we aim to demonstrate our values through an analysis of positionality as it relates to deafness and other topics we analyze (Graham & Horejes, 2017; Saldaña, 2018). This may assist other scholars who wish to disrupt and dismantle all inequities in deaf education. Our stances are informed by our thinking about education research, linguistics, deaf studies, disability studies, and anarchism, among other concepts and disciplines. Here, we reflect on relevant traits that comprise our life experiences and views on deaf politics.

Michael was born to a deaf family. He's bilingual in English and American Sign Language (ASL). He is also deaf and lives to spite a neurodegenerative disease. Michael originates from a precarious (USA) working-class background. He's worked with deaf/disabled communities for two decades. As long as he's had an ethical credo, Michael's been an anarchist.

Jessica is hearing and has learned and used ASL for 24 years. Jessica is an educator and researcher who has worked exclusively in ASL-instructional schools and programs. She is straight, cis, white, and from a (USA) middle-class background. Philosophically she's aligned with American Pragmatists (e.g., Dewey, James), which is a tradition that can be aligned with anarchist principles (Asimakopoulos, 2013).

Dai is deaf. He prefers British Sign Language (BSL). Dai is a straight, cis, white, male from a (UK) middle-class background. While he's been interested in left politics and anarchist theory throughout his adult life, Dai's interest in exploring anarchist principles in deaf lifeways is relatively recent, driven by the brewing political crisis in the UK and Europe.

3. Anarcho-Deafness

Our anarchist stance obliges us to rethink the dilemmas of power and authority in deaf education. Nondeaf hegemony is a majoritarian macrostructure of harm based on unjustifiable hierarchies. Where nondeaf socio-political forces disproportionately outnumber deaf people who are minoritized and marginalized (Skyer, 2021b), there is impetus to reimagine the systems that comprise deaf education. Standing opposed to nondeaf hegemony are scholars supporting deaf-led transformations of deaf education (Kusters, 2017; National Deaf Center, 2020; O'Brien, 2020; Santini, 2015; Valente, 2011). These critiques analyze dilemmas present in deaf education to converge on claims for educational sovereignty, self-determination, and autonomy.

We stand in solidarity with our deaf colleagues worldwide who work to replace outdated, harmful systems, construct new paths to benefit contemporary deaf people, and ensure that future deaf people can thrive.

Our goals are expansive and focused. They include evolutionary changes to make deaf spaces more humane and beautiful (Cherryholmes, 1999; Kurz et al., 2021). We also envision an optimistic rearticulation of deaf education's teleology (Scott et al., 2023b). Consequently, we propose that the most coherent means to achieve our goals is by expanding anarchism in deaf studies. Henceforth, our analysis of anarcho-deafness consists of four parts: collectivism, mutual aid, direct action, and the refusal to submit (see Figure 1). These concern interrelationships between (a) sub/systems of deaf education, which we've introduced. Next, we juxtapose them alongside, (b) the theories, ethics, and actions ("praxis") of anarchism. Like classical anarchists, we are interested in the past and the future (Horowitz, 1964, citing Bakunin, Malatesta, and Kropotkin); however, we don't just theorize distant time periods. Anarchism is not some far-off goal. We can "do anarchism" to revitalize deaf education systems *right now*.

3.1. Thesis

Deaf Culture is already imbued with anarchist tenets; furthermore, synthesizing anarcho-deafness assists anarchists and deaf groups mutually. Rather than consolidate external "top down" authority, or "bottom up" social democracy, we situate an *inside out* analysis to explore a radical, emic locus of deaf power toward deaf education system change (Kusters et al., 2017; Skyer, 2021b). Broadly, we posit that the sole means to reconcile systemic incoherence in deaf education is through a deaf-led transformation, which can be aided through anarchist praxis. To adequately explore this idea, we briefly introduce anarchism and then link it to changes and dilemmas in deaf education. Then, in the next section, we explore our thesis in four ways, using the four subthemes that illustrate connections between anarchism and deaf studies.

3.2. Anarchism

Anarchism is not one thing, but many. Its theories and applications, like its theorists and activists, are global and diverse (Gelderloos, 2010). Far from being impractical or impossible, anarchism is a profoundly useful set of ideas (Asimakopoulos, 2013). Anarchist praxis positively interprets concepts like self-organization and disrupts harmful actions like tyrannical state-violence (CrimethInc, 2017; Proudhon, 1849). Anarchism differs from communism, socialism, and other melioristic stances insofar as

ANARCHO-DEAFNESS:

ONE THESIS WITH FOUR SUB-THEMES

THESIS — ANARCHO-DEAFNESS
○ Deaf individuals and communities are already imbued with anarchist praxis, which can be strengthened toward shared goals.

01 — COLLECTIVISM
○ Deaf individuals and anarchists collaborate in communities to increase the probability of not only surviving but thriving.

02 — MUTUAL AID
○ Community solidarity in deaf and anarchist spaces means that aid is freely given and reciprocated; assistance is not based on charity.

03 — DIRECT ACTION
○ Distributed power supports local control by individuals and groups (deaf and anarchist) via effective protests that affect change.

04 — REFUSAL TO SUBMIT
○ Deaf-centric power is grown from the inside out; resisting outside control supports the goal of deaf-led system change.

Figure 1. Anarcho-deafness.

anarchists believe that, to transform society, dominating social relations must be expelled completely (Bookchin, 2005). We cannot attend to all variances but emphasize that anarchism is plural with a long, international history embodying many successes. As Horowitz (1964, p. 60) points out, anarchists are fundamentally concerned with transforming society: "Anarchism is an argument of perfection against an imperfect world. [Anarchism] is a rising force of voluntary association[s] to bring about rejuvenation.''

3.3. Deaf Education and Anarchism

Anarchism provides useful concepts to theorize education (DeLeon, 2008; Suissa, 2010). This includes problems latent in deaf education (O'Brien & Emery, 2023). Skyer (2021b, pp. 420–421) writes:

> Anarchism [is] a critique of the state's failed relationship with the people. [It] emphasizes local networks, mutual aid, [and] direct action [because the state] failed to provide those goods to minoritized communities. [The] "failures" of deaf education [are] not failures of individual deaf educators, deaf students, or deaf communities. Instead, they are failures of education [systems] unwilling to respond to [deaf people's] situated needs.

The state is not the only problem, nor is the state one thing; however, the state—including laws regulating education—*is* a dominating force that demonstrably imperils deaf persons (Skyer, 2019). Later, we return to these ideas. Currently, we hasten to point out that failed state-led systems are often circumvented by self-organized deaf students, educators, and the wider deaf community. This history of deaf heterarchical powers comprises the subtext of what follows.

3.4. Four Sub-Themes

To explore our main argument, we synthesized four overlapping loci where anarchist praxis expressly aligns with constructs immanent in deaf communities. Each is elucidated through examples of deaf individuals who've seized and wielded power in deaf education and research (Harris & Loeffler, 2015).

3.4.1. Collectivism Is Necessary for Survival in Anarchist and Deaf Communities

Like anarchists, deaf people rely on themselves, their own ingenuity, and their role in wider communities to realize shared goals, including equity in education, social labor, and politics (Hall et al., 2016). In this, desires for community interdependence, individualism, *and* autonomy are coherent, not contradictory. Anarchists and deaf individuals each co-labor to increase the probability of surviving as individuals and thriving in communities (Horowitz, 1964). For example, Bookchin (2005) cites anarchist cooperative endeavors between disabled and nondisabled groups in his social ecology theory to demonstrate the macrostructure of human relationships.

Like anarchists who work arm-in-arm, deaf groups exhibit uncanny solidarity, which transcends traditional social boundaries. Deaf communal care exists across considerable changes in geographical, temporal, technological, political, and sociocultural structures (De Meulder et al., 2019; Murray, 2008). Ladd (2003) and Holcomb (2012), outline how deaf people build collective cultures and support one another if facing duress. Lindsay (2022, p. 186) examines how deaf business owners deliberately hire other deaf people and supply meaningful "opportunities [to develop] their skills and career progressions."

Collectivism is required when deaf people converse in sign languages. Deaf Culture embraces collectivism so much that there's a vernacular style of architecture called DeafSpace—whole buildings are manifest on the principle of "care for the well-being of others" (Bauman, 2014, p. 388). Research about proxemics shows deaf conversationalists expend collective effort to care for one another's physical well-being meanwhile navigating architectural environments (Bauman, 2014; Sirvage, 2015). Elsewhere, Kusters (2009) reports on negotiated, community care in train-cars among deaf citizens of Mumbai (India), where deaf-positive spaces are maintained to protect physical and social well-being. In education, Kusters (2017) also shows that deaf educators feel intergenerational responsibility toward their deaf students. Research suggests this ethic of care enables and defines deaf community cohesion (Emery, 2016).

3.4.2. Mutual Aid Is Integral in Deaf and Anarchist Camps

Mutual aid is an anarchist theory of relational assistance that is freely given, reciprocated, voluntary, and active. Kropotkin (1902/2021) who defined it, writes: "Mutual aid is the real foundation of [human] ethical conceptions" (p. 227). Kropotkin shows that equitable assistance requires giving-and-receiving, and benefits partners differently. Kropotkin even cites cooperative efforts among disabled and non-disabled people.

Mutual aid is community solidarity. It works against harmful hierarchies and toward harmonious heterarchies in deaf and anarchist spaces. We cite two transnational examples. First, the Deaf Academics Conference (https://dac2023.com/dac) is a formal research group whose members are all deaf. The Deaf Academics Conference's local units and partner organizations are worldwide and support deaf academics who produce and share scientific research about deafness across national boundaries and systems of government. Second, through a plurality of sign languages and sites, the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD; https://wfdeaf.org) is another transnational, globally-networked affinity group of deaf individuals who endeavor to uplift other deaf people. A WFD principle is that deaf people from advanced nations support comrades in developing countries (De Meulder et al., 2019).

We recognize that not all parties in mutualist deaf networks must have the same form or amount of power. However, we argue against charity assistance, where deaf people are positioned as powerless (Vygotsky, 1993). Non-mutual assistance requires that deaf people act as passive recipients of outsider aid that may not be needed or desired. This is coercion. Missionary aid and governmental social work seldom operate on mutual principles. In deaf spaces, they can harm Indigenous deaf people via combined paternalism, audism, and literal colonialism (Skyer & Cochell, 2020). Evidence shows that the Church of England frequently disrupts deaf-centric, non-conformist religious spaces (Ladd, 2003; Lysons, 1965). We lack basic research about exploitative relationships between religion, charity, and imperialism in deaf communities, but our experiences suggest that their role in deaf history is large and should be researched from an anarchist standpoint. Doing so would likely reveal other unjustifiable hierarchies, including the subordination of deaf people's knowledge of god through writing (Skyer, 2023a).

Mutual aid exists in deaf communities under different guises. For example, "deaf-gelt" is "a talent, ability or behavioral quality which could…*benefit the whole community*" (Ladd, 2003, p. 340, emphasis in original). Deaf people with strong writing skills might aid others possessing different skills. In deaf-gelt, the work of translating a letter could be compensated by a meal and shared sign language conversation. This tactic kept exchanges of aid inside deaf communities not through the work of outsiders, like hired interpreters who were not deaf. Overall, deaf mutual aid exists and can be expanded in deaf communities; likewise, between deaf and anarchist groups. In our conclusion, we discuss the tension between access and inaccessibility in activist spaces, which may prevent mutual aid and suggest means to circumvent it.

3.4.3. Direct Action Networks Using Local Power Overlap in Deaf and Anarchist Groups

A third locus of interest where anarchism and deafness overlap is applications of intense power through direct action. Direct action leverages subordinated but determined groups against enemies vastly more populous or powerful. Anarchist direct action examples include the 1871 Paris Commune, the 1936 Spanish Revolution, the 1999 Battle for Seattle, and the Rojava (YPG) fighters in contemporary Syria. When facing threats or incursions by outsiders, deaf groups also rally local networks and consolidate power. Direct action supports small groups of self-determined deaf individuals to become stronger tactical forces capable of resolving specific local dilemmas.

Direct action has a lengthy history in deaf education. Emery (2016) posits that direct action is a feature (not a "bug") of Deaf Culture. In writing this section, we found we had too many examples to pick from. Therefore, we focus only on grassroots direct actions instigated by deaf youngsters who have self-organized heterarchical power and successfully agitated for targeted political changes.

In direct actions, deaf people organize, struggle, and win against entrenched political bureaucrats, corporate elites, or uninformed policymakers hostile to deaf lifeways. The most famous example occurred in 1988. *Deaf President Now!* was a successful set of direct actions at Gallaudet University (US), the world's only deaf university. *Deaf President Now!* was an organic outpouring of dissent against the board of trustees who appointed a nondeaf president over an equally qualified deaf candidate. In response, students organized several direct actions—including the use of human chains and a blockade of buses—across weeks of unrelenting pressure against the board, who eventually conceded defeat. Afterward, Gallaudet University's first deaf president, I King Jordan, was confirmed (Jankowski, 1997).

Deaf President Now! exemplifies a nonviolent deaf community variety of the anarchist tactic called "propaganda of the deed," which is defined as one successful high-profile direct action that inspires a set of subsequent actions. *Deaf President Now!* continues to embolden deaf students to rise and overthrow unjust material conditions. We discuss two recent cases below.

In 2011, there was a sudden, unjust closure of the 4201 schools in New York (US), which serve deaf, blind, and disabled youth (Kappen, 2011; Santini, 2015). In response, primary and secondary students led the community in revolt. During 2011, Michael was a classroom teacher in a 4201 school. He applauded his deaf high schoolers who stood in solidarity with the young deaf children in the school gymnasium and signed anti-State and anti-austerity protest chants in ASL. With the later support of other classroom teachers, administrators, and parents, the deaf students organized a convoy of buses that transported hundreds of students from a dozen schools to the state capitol. At the end of the actions, the budget cuts were reversed and full-fledged funding was restored (Huntley, 2011).

Second, in 2021, a high school-aged student group at a residential deaf education institute in Georgia (US) protested the selection of a white, hearing superintendent who was not fluent in ASL. Through coordinated direct action events, the deaf youth successfully ousted the interim leader. The direct action eventually resulted in the hiring of a new, deaf superintendent (Scott et al., 2023a). One of the Latino deaf protest leaders, Trinity Arreola, "was inspired to speak out against audism and racism…by earlier protests at Gallaudet University" (Morris, 2021). As these other examples show, deaf people effectively use direct action to revolt and force institutions and governments to address local educational crises. Through a unity of purpose, direct action consolidates deaf power and inspires future change.

3.4.4. Deaf and Anarchist Groups Existentially Refuse To Be Subdued

Our final theme is the refusal to be subdued by existential threats or ruled by outsiders. Here, we focus on how deaf community organizers preserve and enrich sign languages when threatened by nondeaf hegemony at the intersection of research, policy, and education. Our anarchist stance on deaf power obligates us to discuss complex relationships, including conflicts of autonomy and coercion between deaf people, sign languages, and the personnel who operate education systems. We focus on the hostility of nondeaf, non-signing policymakers, and dilemmas of power between deaf people and sign language interpreters in schools. Lastly, we analyze toxic ideas about sign language stemming from nondeaf researchers, and counterarguments by deaf professionals who refuse to be subdued.

The persistence of sign languages is the tangible result of deaf subversion. Deaf history is largely a story of deaf people resisting nondeaf authority figures who are hostile to sign languages. In Soviet Russia, despite top-down regulations that ostracized signers, deaf people subversively signed in schools (Shaw, 2017). Vygotsky (1993) who studied the matter, wrote: “It is impossible to ban [sign] language….It may be forbidden, and its users punished, but this does not mean that it is defeated” (p. 90). More recently, a critical mass of deaf students assembled in Nicaragua at what was supposed to comprise a new school that had outlawed signing (Senghas et al., 2005). In spite of this philosophy, a deaf student coalition constructed a novel sign language in an action of linguistic rebellion (Senghas & Coppola, 2001).

In some ways, the relationships between deaf signing clients and nondeaf sign language interpreters is one of dependence. Originally, determining the quality of sign language interpreting was a task that was vetted by deaf people (Garrett & Girardin, 2020). Deaf people led the training of sign language interpreters. Deaf people determined if interpreters were qualified or not (Hall et al., 2016). When the US Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID; https://rid.org) was formed, it signaled the end of deaf-led quality control of interpreters. RID is presently led by a nondeaf majority—to our knowledge, less than a third of RID leadership is deaf. By devising this structure, the power to evaluate sign language workers was *taken* from deaf communities and *bestowed* on nondeaf outsiders (Wright, 2019). In an ongoing conflict without resolution, deaf Americans are struggling to gain power in RID. As Hall et al. (2016) and Caselli et al. (2020) state—directly or inadvertently—sign language interpreters may contribute to systemic antideaf oppression and recapitulate epistemic violence.

Deaf power is expanding in modern professional spheres as a needed counterweight to problematic audist theories and methodologies (Young & Temple, 2014). Research produced by deaf scientists, like Moges-Riedel et al. (2020), Glickman and Hall (2018), Henner et al. (2021), Gulati (2019), Humphries et al. (2012, 2022), and others, shows that with sufficient exposure to signing deaf role models, deaf children experience natural language acquisition. Contrariwise, language deprivation and brain damage are *caused* by people who withhold sign language (Scott et al., 2023b; Singleton & Newport, 2004). Deaf-led research subverts unjustifiable hierarchies like phonocentric discourse ideologies (Skyer, 2021b). Our anarchist stance clarifies: Any hierarchy based on ableism or audism is unjust and must be rejected. Centering anarchist praxis assists deaf researchers who desire a system change in deaf education and generates succor for ongoing struggles about deaf self-determination and cultural and linguistic revitalization at the community level. As Jankowski (1997, p. 46) writes, “because sign language was [shared by] deaf people not the dominant society, this difference naturally drew deaf people closer together [and] fostered [a] self-governed deaf community.”

4. Embrace Anarcho-Deafness

4.1. Reject Incoherence

That biomedical and sociocultural institutions of deaf education are incoherent is a source of harm. This impediment to progress results from centuries of crushing antideaf oppression and a remarkable history of deaf struggle involving collectivism, mutual aid, direct action, and a tenacious refusal to submit. Deaf-led struggles for power have slowed and even reversed nondeaf hegemony—this subversion must be explored and expanded.

Biomedicine is the main source of nondeaf hegemony. By positioning deafness as “deviant,” deaf people are pathologized (Namboodiripad & Henner, 2022). Biomedicine claims to be “factual” and “objective” but tacitly condones cultural and linguistic death (Skyer, 2023b). It has the greatest capacity for antideaf harm (Scott et al., 2023b). Biomedicine concomitantly: (a) lacks evidence that sign language causes harm, (b) denies the prosocial habilitative role of sign languages in deaf education, and (c) refuses to accept undeniable evidence about the benefits of sign language (Glickman & Hall, 2018; Scott & Henner, 2021; Scott & Hoffmeister, 2017). Biomedicine and sociocultural stances aren’t opposing views; they cannot be reconciled. It is impossible to compromise on the view that deaf people are medically-deficient or inferior. We are emphatic: *Nondeaf hegemony cannot be reformed, only abolished.*

Deaf people may benefit from deepening a commitment to anarchist praxis in struggles against social domination and educational injustice. Numerous stances exist about mechanisms of change in deaf education. Traditionalists wish to stay the course. Reformers desire incremental change. Atavists repeal change. We are not content with these options. Our deaf-anarchist synthesis uniquely supports the deaf-led transformation of deaf education. The foregoing shows why this confluence is important to research. The remaining analyses suggest how it may occur. Throughout, we aim for a praxis redolent of both the deaf-led struggle for power and successful anarchist actions.

Our arguments are built with the understanding that our basic tenets and conclusions may be rejected. Yet, we find it necessary to co-labor and engage with anarchist theory. Why? To upset entrenched systems. To fight harmful and unjustifiable hierarchies. To eliminate coercion. We welcome debate, even strong disagreement. Dissension would show that *anarcho-deafness* has standing. Dissensus may benefit the deaf community by elevating contrarian emic views and informing deaf people about parallels between deaf and anarchist struggles to transform society (Rancière, 2010; Skyer, 2021a). Despite marginal risks, we are firm—it is *necessary* for deaf people to lead the transformation of deaf education.

4.2. Skepticism of Democracy

Our deaf-anarchist arguments strongly contrast deaf education systems grounded in democracy; moreover, they require skepticism of democracy (Rancière, 2010), specifically, the state's role and motivations in (deaf) education (DeLeon, 2008). Democracy is complex and full of unresolved tensions and ambiguities. Most non-anarchists regard democracy as a flawed but "lesser-evil" approach to managing human affairs. In the contemporary US and UK, which we (the authors) are most familiar with, democracy is *sold* as oppositional two-party politics (CrimethInc, 2017). Where the left has liberals and neoliberals (Democrats, Labour, etc.) who support a degree of social freedom, deregulation, and free-market capitalism, the right has conservatives and neoconservatives (Republicans, Tories, etc.) who favor traditionalism, nationalism, and authoritarian control. These ideas are predicated on prejudice, xenophobia, and lurking antisocial fascism.

Anarchists understand that democracy is mortally flawed. Opposition among "wings" is incidental, anarchists claim, amid totalizing state-based oppression. Contrasting the "horseshoe" model, we endorse the "ratchet" metaphor as the most apt. In this, rightward movement is inevitable and the left force is reserved for brief interludes of "resistance" (Skyer, 2023a).

While a comprehensive review of democracy is outside our scope, two outcomes appear general for all democracies. First, the people comprise the state. But, second, the state takes precedence over the people. We are skeptical. We doubt that the state desires to or even can represent a people, much less a deaf population it systematically refuses to understand (Skyer, 2019). We also contend that the state relies on amoral, unethical operations of majoritarianism and coercion undertaken in the name of "democracy" (Boorstin, 1975; Rancière, 2010). These operations impact deaf people in specific ways.

4.3. Deaf People versus the State

The context of democracy matters in a deaf education system change because the majority of research about deaf education comes from (and is limited by) Western European traditional canons. This two-hundred-year history is dominated by white nondeaf men who've constructed a "scientific" rationale for social domination against deaf lifeways. This research is, subtly or overtly, aligned with majoritarianism, which, by its inherent design, overwhelms dissenting minorities by force.

Our anarcho-deaf model is predicated on the idea that there are fundamental limits to deaf education via the statist-democratic governance of deaf education. Top-down state regulations for deaf schools based in *or* resulting in the continuance of nondeaf hegemony are fundamentally at odds with deaf community freedom and self-determination (Bookchin, 2005; CrimethInc, 2017; NDC, 2020). State democracy has specific harmful repercussions and negative consequences in deaf education, including but not limited to pervasive linguistic harms and educational neglect against vulnerable young deaf people.

We find that the state does not resolve systemic dilemmas, but often causes and maintains pervasive structural harms against deaf people and deaf lifeways. The state cannot bestow or vouchsafe freedom. All people, including all deaf people, are already free but require self-determination *and* a lack of oppression to exercise that autonomy. As supporters of anarchist ideologies, we do not support state-based frameworks for power bestowed. This includes the "democratic" control of deaf schools and research traditions, which are often harmful hierarchies operating under a guise of benevolence. "Inclusion," for example, isn't usually problematized, yet it tacitly posits an "in-group" who monopolizes power and grants only small concessions to "tolerate" the "other.''

4.4. The State and Deaf People

Here's another contradiction we wish to highlight: Deaf people rely on state aid. Some do so for fundamental access to food and shelter, others for access to education. In the USA and UK, there are enclaves of deaf people who rely on the state as the guarantor of access to governmental affairs, education, markets, and workplaces. The Equalities Act, the Access to Work Act (UK), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (US) are legislative constructs that configure and *monetize* deaf accessibility. Said differently, these laws interface disability into a scheme that props up market capitalism (Skyer, 2019).

Yet, in the UK, the largest, most successful deaf political campaign resulted in the official recognition of BSL. Organized by the Federation of Deaf People (FDP), founded in 1997, the FDP are deaf volunteer activists who were exhausted by the stagnation of bureaucracy and national deaf organizations that failed to resolve a major existential dilemma about BSL. The FDP organized direct action events in London and inspired smaller actions in Bristol and Wolverhampton, consisting of road blockades and sit-ins in solidarity with the Deaf Liberation Front (DLF). The outcome of this sustained pressure was the official governmental recognition of BSL as a language. This victory was a huge step forward that shocked traditionalist deaf organizations into the realization that there was an appetite for radical politics (Beschizza et al., 2015; Emery, 2016).

We are keenly aware of this contradiction—anarchists reject the state but also live in state democracies, and may rely on the state in one way or another. As anarchists work to abolish the state, most still live in states. Meanwhile, they can contest specific actions of the state. If they can't abolish the state's violence *today*, then, instead, today we *can* demand that the state does more good and less harm. This argument toward anarcho-pragmatism in and outside deaf education is not a fundamental contradiction. While two of us (Michael and Dai, who are deaf) understand that the state supports our survival, our stance is unfulfilled with mere survival. We're not content with "access" to ableist government, or "inclusive" markets and schools. These are examples of the many unjustifiable hierarchies that must be banished by self-determined deaf people, working to rebuild deaf education from the inside out.

5. Challenges Synthesizing an Absent Literature

Given a dearth of literature, our text synthesizes and explores evidence linking deafness, disability, and anarchism. We encountered unique problems due to limited prior research on this confluence of ideas. As a result, we examined many left-populist constructs (Mouffe, 2018), professing to transcend flaws in modern democracies, including deaf studies from classical libertarians, democratic socialists, and communists. We also bring evidence from our recalled experiences as teachers and researchers. We draw incomparable richness from the "gray literature," including varied TED talks, soapbox speeches, zines, and Google Drives of cached documents that describe and analyze subversion and mutual aid in deaf education. Far from being a detriment, this "gray" literature was a major asset. Like deaf people, anarchists support surfacing marginalized "unwritten" histories; likewise, both groups reject the gatekeeping that often reinforces marginality (Harris & Loeffler, 2015).

We found little deaf research explicitly about anarchism (O'Brien & Emery, 2023; Skyer, 2021b). We expanded our review to anarchist literature and disability activism studies but found little direct engagement on deaf anarchist praxis. *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Activism* (Berghs et al., 2020), for example, never mentions anarchism and has but one chapter about deaf activism. By expanding our focus, we found treatments of *disability* in some anarchist frameworks (Ben-Moshe et al., 2009) and oblique references to disability in classical anarchist texts.

In the latter, we found outdated terminology and insufficient synthesis. Bookchin (1982) extended the human urge for equality to include disabled people in preliterate societies. He writes: "Wherever possible, society will compensate for the infirmities of the ill, handicapped, and old, just as it will for the very young [who depend] on adults" (p. 109). Malatesta (1884) also observes that social support for disabled people in anarchist societies is vital: "The lame, the weak and the aged should be supported by society, because it is the duty of humanity that no one should suffer. We'll grow old too, or could become crippled or weak, just as those dearest to us." This neatly anticipates the postmodern claim that, eventually, we shall all be disabled (WAAD, 2022).

A compelling strand of thinking about radical egalitarianism came to us from disability studies, including Ben-Moshe et al. (2009) and Davis (2013) who describe disability in terms of biocultural diversity. Bauman and Murray (2014) similarly support cooperative labor among groups of people with varying disabilities, including intrinsic and extrinsic benefits sourced from deaf lifeways. This perspective departs from and inverts ableist assumptions that deaf/disabled people depend entirely on nondisabled others (including governments) for survival, and supports cooperative work by deaf and disabled people in subcultures who may thrive absent authoritarian social norms and ableist hierarchies.

5.1. Expanding the Praxis of Anarcho-Deafness

Thus far, we've analyzed how deaf people gain by anarchism, next we focus on how anarchists can reciprocate. As deaf scholars, Michael and Dai find that engaging in traditional anarchist politics is burdensome. It's hard to "do anarchism" cut off from networks and movements by language barriers. Deaf people may find that points of entry to anarchism are twice-limited by language: First, because most anarchists can't sign; and second, because most anarchist theory is written in English. Not all deaf people have the same literacy competencies and many global deaf people will never learn English (Knoors & Marschark, 2015).

Anarchists who profess an ethics founded on radical equality should be fundamentally concerned with disabled people's plights. Mutualist direct action is needed. Translations of anarchist texts into local sign languages are welcome. Radical meetings will improve for deaf people when allied interpreters are present. Michael recalls a recent street demonstration made accessible by an interpreter who was signing and walking backward, so as to provide access for the deaf people and deaf students who were present. We also welcome nondeaf allies, radical-minded teachers, researchers, interpreters, and community organizers to co-labor with deaf people without paternalism, coercion, or hierarchy. How might anarchists benefit? For tacticians, we posit this incendiary notion—police have weaponized hand signs for street combat, but authentic sign *languages* would be an ideal, covert means of communication.

While writing this article was one example of anarcho-deaf praxis, work should continue. Our efforts demonstrate productive forms of inter-ability thinking, deaf/nondeaf solidarity-based agitation, and transnational scholarly networking. It would be instructive to learn from other anarcho-deaf teams in other places. This should include consciously uplifting intersectional perspectives, which may reveal new forms of agitation and deaf community organizing. Careful analyses of deaf subcultures and micro-communities may reveal if anarchism can resolve intersections of ableism or hierarchies grounded in racialized, gendered, economic stratification, or class divisions. To address an absent literature, these and other counter-narratives must be documented.

6. Conclusion: Anarcho-Deafness and Deaf-Led System Change

Analyzing systemic dilemmas in deaf education via anarchist praxis is a novel approach toward deaf-led transformation in deaf education. Deaf power is not bestowed by the state. It is built not through democratic consensus, but by self-determined struggle (CrimethInc, 2017). Deaf power is not vulgar mob rule. It requires communitarian labor and mutual aid. The deaf-led transformation of power must be grown from the inside out. A deaf-led system change can only be realized by deaf individuals and deaf communities working in solidarity against oppression. This work can be revitalized by embracing and deepening anarcho-deafness.

As we argue, many iconic and beloved aspects of Deaf Culture, like collectivism, mutualism, direct action, and resisting outsider control, are also the basic tenets of anarchism. We also note the existential need for *critical masses* of deaf students to sustain heterarchical sign language transmission by deaf peers in schools (DeConde Johnson & DesGeorges, n.d.; Humphries, 2013). We note that "critical mass" is an insurrectionary concept of anarchist origin (Blue, 2012).

Rather than deny the shared lineage of anarcho-deafness, we wish to expand it. Furthermore, doing so mutually benefits both anarchists and deaf communities. Hierarchies exist that ought to be abolished in both deaf and anarchist groups. Their abolition is a mutual goal. There is enormous potential for deaf/disabled people to engage with anarchism, not only to counter the damage of ableism, but to consciously politicize deaf and disabled communities. It's no coincidence that the old protest chant—"Nothing about us without us!"—has postmodern analogs that are used by deaf and disabled people doing digital agitprop, using hashtags, and constructing Tweets and memes.

Within the anarcho-deafness confluence, the staid egalitarian mantra—"from each according to their abilities and to each according to their needs"—acquires a new disability-forward thrust, which requires new analysis. Toward deaf education system change, our deaf-anarchist stance interjects these necessary questions: Whose abilities? Whose needs? And, probably most importantly: Who decides?

Here, we stand firm. Deaf people decide. The community of deaf individuals decides. Anything less is unethical. Anything less perpetuates systemic incoherence and maintains the yoke of nondeaf hegemony. In closing, we argue that toward radical equality and the transformation of deaf education systems, there is no time like the present. And there is no power but deaf power.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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