DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING SMARTPHONE USERS: INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE PENETRATION OF ABLEIST COMMUNICATION NORMS

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AGENDA

- Background information
  - Communication Norms
  - Technology and Disability
  - Intersectionality
- Study
  - Questions
  - Method
  - Findings
- Conclusion
- Outlook

COMMUNICATION NORMS

"This liberal humanist perspective defines those who are able to speak "properly" as human and rational while marking others as non normative"

- Ideal human communication: based on the use of spoken language
- People who can't hear can be excluded from society

COMMUNICATION NORMS

- Today's communication is connected to *"new media based practises"*

- Use of *"natural elements"* in electronic communication (e.g voice calls)

  - instant feedback, language variety, constant reachability, emotional attachment to medium, FOMO

- **Presumption of able-bodiedness** and ignorance of people with different communication needs: deaf and HoH people

- **Leads to stigmatisation of these groups** because they do not have the same *"cultural communicative standards"*

COMMUNICATION NORMS

- Able-bodiedness is seen as the standard

- Deaf and HoH people are expected to wear hearing aids, implants, and to go to speech therapy

  - Speech should sound as "normal" as possible
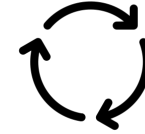
  - Sign language is seen as non-normative

TECHNOLOGY AND DISABILITY

- Technology and especially smartphones have some accessible features

- **But:** Technology is designed by able-bodied people

- Disabled people are excluded

  - Replication of oppression of different bodies

- **Disability as product of able-bodied structures**

INTERSECTIONALITY

- **Intersectionality**:

 *"This is where **some source of oppression intersects with another** meaning that people who belong to **more than one marginalised group** may suffer **greater discrimination** based on their cultural distance from the normal body"*

- Oppression can be possible because of:

  - Gender

  - Nationality

  - Religion

QUESTIONS

- How do ableist norms of "hearing" communication interact with assumptions of constant mobile reachability in shaping deaf and HoH people's smartphone use?

- And more importantly, how might the accessible features of the smartphone themselves contribute to the social oppression of disabled users, especially when they are part of diverse social groups?

METHOD

- Study on **perspective of disabled people themselves**
  - Person who identifies as HoH interviewed 20 people
- **Participants:** Israeli citizens between 19 and 72 who own a smartphone
- Interviewees from different subgroups in Israel: **Intersectional analysis**
- Because of communicative diversity - different types of interviews

FINDINGS

"I think that hearing people expect me to reply quickly, right away – "Ariel, we're in the middle of a discussion, don't disappear!"—and deaf people know that we exchange messages with fifty thousand other people at a time, so they're more relaxed (...) Hearing people get annoyed unless I reply (...) because they are so used to the immediacy of voice calls. They tell me that the amount of texting gets them down (...) that it's really hard for them, so they say, "I wish I could send you recorded [voice] messages on WhatsApp." (...) but sometimes with men it's quite cute, like "Wow, Ariel, I'd really like to hear your voice. I miss you." (Ariel, 34)

- Expectation of constant reachability and inclusion of *"natural elements"*

- Expectation towards Women: normalcy and attractive

FINDINGS

"I try not to emphasize that I'm HoH, so that people won't notice. I only mention it if people are problematic or say something very unclearly. Then I say, "Sorry, could you repeat that?" without explaining why (...) I don't want to give rise to any stigma (...) Some people, for example, talk from one corner of the room and their hands-free phone is far away (...) nobody, not even a hearing person, could understand what they're saying. I don't have a hear- ing problem and I can hear where the person is (...) And then I said: "Please pick up the phone and speak clearly, because I (...)" He asked, "why?" And I replied, "because I can't hear you well." And then he said, "I didn't know that about you (...)." (Reuven)

- Fear of audistic stigma: so he uses voice calls to pass as hearing

- Pretends to be a hearing person - reflection of his internalisation of a *"normal body"*

FINDINGS

"I was talking to someone on my mobile in order to schedule a docttor's appointment. And then (...) [my] babies (...) were crying but I couldn't hear them, and the woman on the phone, and there was someone else knocking at the door, and I didn't hear either of them (...) and the hearing aid was buzzing (...). Then I realized that someone was knocking on the door (...) and it was so embarrassing when I saw it was my brother-in- law (...) I felt so embarrassed because he heard me screaming on the phone and my children crying as well and (...) with all the background noise of my crying children, the phone conversation and the knocking on my door, I had no idea that I was yelling so loudly." (Jasmin, 30)

- Member of ultra orthodox society: expectation of taking care of children and household

FINDINGS

"[Text] messages are a really nice way to communicate, but sometimes you need a phone call as well. There are hard of hearing or deaf people who can't make voice calls, and that's fine, so it's important for them to have a good camera in order to be able to talk face to face. For me, it's important to have good sound, because I can more or less get by. If I can get by [by turning the volume up] and I can talk, then I can't give it up. You have to train your brain to do this, to maintain [the ability to understand voice calls] otherwise you lose it (…)."(Amir, 34)

- Perceived superiority: he differentiates himself from deaf people

- His critics echoes negative social perceptions in Arab society of deaf and HoH persons

CONCLUSION

- Voice/video call as the most problematic function of smartphones

  - **Voice/video call becomes a mechanism of oppression**

- Intersectional perspective

  - interviewees had different responses and attitudes to the expectation to perform voice calls

  - People of multiple **marginalised groups** (gender, age, sexuality, nationality, religiosity) are **more negatively affected by media technology**

- HoH people try to separate themselves from deaf people and avoiding *"coming out"* as disabled

OUTLOOK
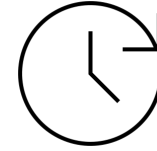
„Future research should focus on disabled individuals motives, narratives and social survival on social media"

(Bitman/John 2019: 68)