



Deconstructing identity in pedagogy: an autoethnographic study of a female, millennial and disabled lecturer in South African higher education

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Abstract

The Higher Education sector in South Africa has undergone a significant socio-political and academic transformation since the inception of democracy in 1994. Such transformations largely focused on instilling values of tolerance and respect to create a sense of unity among the country's previously divided peoples. Despite the considerable progress that has been achieved, challenges related to gender, generational identity and disability, among others, continue to persist. Considering that the identities of lecturers play a crucial role in informing their pedagogies, this study deconstructs the complexities of my identity as a university lecturer. More specifically, to guide this study, the research question was: How do my intersecting identities as a female, millennial, and epileptic university lecturer influence my pedagogical practices in History Education? The study drew upon the intersectionality theory, which highlighted the need to view myself as a complex being and consider the intermeshing of my identities, particularly in my professional space. The methodological approach was autoethnography, which involved reflective pedagogy by critically examining the intricate relationships between my personal and professional identities. The data was collected through personal narratives from my journal entries and self-observations. The findings showed a distinct relationship between my identities related to gender, generational identity and disability and the aspects of curriculum design, technology-based pedagogical approaches, inclusive student engagement and critical dialoguing. Thus, this study illustrates the necessity of reflective pedagogy, especially with the role of identity in shaping pedagogical considerations and teacher-development, and proposes a model to cope with the institutional constraints and social stigma in Higher Education.

Keywords: intersectionality, disability, women, ageism, higher education, history education

Introduction

With the increased discourses around diversity and inclusion in Higher Education (HE), the voices of marginalised sub-groupings, such as the physically and mentally challenged, women and people of different ages, are being highlighted. The global attitude towards the abovementioned marginalised sub-groupings have evolved from the previously openly suppressive perceptions to a more liberal and emancipative outlook (Cascio, et al. 2021; Al-Qahtani, et al. 2020; Josefsson & Wall, 2020). While this is certainly a welcome phenomenon, the negative stigma associated with the sub-groupings persist in contemporary

societies and continues to result in discriminatory practices such as institutional disablism, gender bias and ageist tendencies.

Reflective praxis is important for lecturers as it helps correlate the impact their identities have on their pedagogies (Kessler, 2023). Therefore, as a disabled Generation Y (also referred to as millennial) female lecturer, these intersecting identities not only shape my experiences in HE but also my teaching methods, engagement with students, and overall academic career. The dual pressures of navigating academia as a woman with a disability, combined with my experiences of being a millennial in a rapidly evolving educational landscape, compelled a

closer examination of my lived experiences. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how my intersecting identities as a female, millennial, and epileptic university lecturer influence my pedagogical practices in History Education. The teaching of History Education entails module co-ordination, curriculum design, content delivery, student engagement, and assessment. Through this exploration, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourses of inclusivity in HE, illustrates the necessity of reflective pedagogy, and proposes ways to cope with the accompanying challenges.

Context

The disabled, people of varying ages, and women have been subjected to multifarious narratives based on the controversial nature of their negative stereotypes throughout history. These narratives are the product of the disinformation of socio-political actors with the intent to control populations. For instance, eugenics, a movement that gained prominence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, aimed to improve intergenerational human genetic quality (Wilson, 2020). The father of eugenics, Francis Galton, believed this could be achieved by encouraging reproduction among individuals who were considered 'fit' and discouraging or preventing reproduction among those considered 'unfit'. People with mental and physical disabilities were often targeted by eugenics policies, as they were wrongly perceived as a burden on society and less worthy of inclusion (Powell, 2021). These ideas led to forced sterilisations, institutionalisation and the denial of basic human rights (Amy & Rowlands, 2018). Eugenics perpetuated harmful stereotypes and reinforced ableism contributing to long-lasting stigmas that continue to affect disability rights and inclusion in contemporary societies all over the world.

Eugenics also had a profound impact on women, particularly in how it sought to control their reproductive rights. In the early 20th century, eugenics policies often targeted women as the primary bearers of the genetic future, promoting selective breeding among those deemed fit; while implementing forced sterilisation on those considered 'unfit' such as women from marginalised communities, women with

disabilities and those living in poverty (Avila & James, 2024). Women were subjected to intense scrutiny over their reproductive choices, with their fertility viewed as a tool for shaping society. This control over women's bodies reinforced patriarchal values and often aligned with racist, classist and ableist ideologies. The legacy of eugenics continues to influence modern debates around reproductive rights, body autonomy and social justice. A case in point was the 2024 United States presidential debates between the Democrats who advocate women's reproductive rights, including abortion, and access to contraceptives; versus the Republicans who aim to restrict body rights, condemn abortion and prevent access to reproductive freedom (Chalian, 2024; Kaczynski & Steck, 2024).

SA was also influenced by the ideals of eugenics. Besides the desire to maintain white dominance over the black SA majority during colonialism, the white, particularly Afrikaans, policy makers during apartheid, adopted discriminatory practices that were based on genetic superiority to control the population of SA. With formalised institutional segregation during apartheid, policies reinforced restrictions on interracial marriages to prevent miscegenation through policies such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949. Furthermore, forced sterilisations were a means of controlling the black South African population during apartheid (Teleki, 2023; Norling, 2019). While apartheid formally ended at the beginning of 1994, the Eurocentric eugenics ideals continued to filter, for instance, the permission of guardians of disabled women and girls to undergo involuntary sterilisation (Holness, 2013).

Historically, South Africa has had a contested understanding of gender roles. In pre-colonial Africa, many societies were egalitarian and often had matriarchal lineages (Musingafi, 2023). Women played significant roles in the socio-economic spheres of their communities. They were central to agricultural production, primarily responsible for planting, cultivating and harvesting crops, forming the backbone of many societies' sustenance. Women also managed households, raised children and maintained communal ties, often serving as key figures in the transmission of cultural knowledge and traditions.

Furthermore, women served as leaders and warriors as in the case of Queen Nzinga, and the Dahomey warriors. In societies such as the Zulu, women held positions of influence through their roles as spiritual leaders, healers and advisors (Hokkanen, 2019). Although patriarchal structures existed, women's contributions to the economy, family and social structures were crucial to the stability and survival of their communities.

In contemporary SA, gender and disability are recognised as key areas for social justice and human rights. Gender equality is enshrined in the country's constitution and significant strides have been made in addressing gender-based discrimination. However, challenges do persist in the form of gender-based violence and wage disparities. Women, particularly in leadership and political spheres are gaining more representation but structural inequalities still impact many, especially in the rural areas. Disability rights have similarly gained prominence with policies and laws aimed at ensuring accessibility, equal opportunities and social inclusion for the disabled. However, societal attitudes often lag behind legal advancements and many individuals with disabilities face inherent stigmas, exclusion and limited access to education, employment and healthcare.

Literature review

The intersection of disability, gender and generational identity within academia is an emerging area of research that addresses the complexities of navigating academic spaces while belonging to multiple marginalised groups. This review of literature examines the existing literature on disabled academics, gendered experiences in HE, and the distinct challenges faced by millennials in academic settings.

Disability in academia

Disability studies have increasingly focused on the experiences of disabled professionals in HE, addressing both, institutional and attitudinal barriers that affect their career progression (Brown & Ramlackhan, 2021; Olsen, et al. 2020). Pervasive ableism in academia, where accessibility, lack of accommodations and deeply ingrained prejudices against disability exist (Brown & Leigh, 2020; Finesilver, et al. 2020).

Disabled academics frequently encounter obstacles that limit their participation in research, teaching and leadership roles, resulting in marginalisation within academic hierarchies.

Disabled academics often face pressure to meet the same expectations to be fulfilled by able-bodied people, or to minimise their disability to fit the norms of academic productivity (Andrews, 2020). This pressure creates tension between performing academic excellence and managing the realities of disability, which can lead to emotional, psychological and physical strain, and isolation (Brown, 2020). Studies on disability in academia emphasise the need for institutional change, including the promotion of inclusive policies, accessible infrastructure and support for disabled staff to ensure equitable opportunities.

Gendered experiences in HE

The gendered dimensions of academic life have long been a focus in feminist scholarship, which documents the challenges faced by women in navigating patriarchal structures within HE (Jenkins, 2013). The concept of the gendered organisation was first introduced by Joan Acker arguing that academic institutions are built on male-dominated norms that disadvantage women in terms of career progression, representation in leadership, and the distribution of services (Rodriguez & Guenther, 2022). Women in academia often bear a disproportionate amount of emotional labour and service responsibilities while also facing biases in research recognition and promotion (Roper, 2019).

For female academics with disabilities, these challenges are intensified. Women with disabilities are more likely to experience discriminatory attitudes that intersect with both gender and disability biases (Kim, et al. 2020). Furthermore, disabled women in academia face greater scrutiny regarding their competence and professional capabilities, often encountering sexism and ablism in ways that reinforce each other (Quinn, et al. 2017). This intersectionality creates a distinctive set of obstacles particularly in navigating career advancement, securing funding and achieving professional recognition.

The millennial academic experience

The millennial generation has entered academia during a time of significant transformation in the structure of academic labour and nature of pedagogy. However, they also face a precarious employment condition with many entering academia with a meritorious mindset, expecting to be rewarded through career advancement, a good work-life balance and a sense of recognition (Marozva, et al. 2024). The rise of temporary contract and part-time academics in HE disproportionately affects younger academics, including millennials who are more likely to face job insecurity, lower pay and own less assets (Kurz, et al. 2018).

Millennial academics often report feelings of stress-induced exhaustion, stemming from the high demands of balancing teaching, research and administrative duties with limited institutional support (Chan, et al. 2017). Additionally, generational expectations regarding the emphasis for millennials on work-life balance and flexibility, conflict with traditional academic norms that prioritise long working hours and personal sacrifice for career advancement (Egerová, et al. 2021). As a result, millennials, especially those with additional marginalised identities such as gender or disability, are particularly vulnerable to the pressures of academia.

Theoretical framework

Intersectionality theory is a critical theory that provides a framework to analyse the interconnections between systems of power and social groupings (Atewologun, 2018). Intersectionality analyses social identities such as women and indigenous societies and their relation to racism, gender bias, and ethnonational and religious biases (Ruiz, et al. 2021). As a critical theory, intersectionality emphasises the importance of recognising and deconstructing the power dynamics between oppressors and the marginalised. It also highlights the necessity for giving voice to the marginalised and powerless (Atewologun, 2018). In the context of this study, the intersectional theory helped analyse my experiences of being a female, millennial, and epileptic lecturer in HE. These personal identities

could not be analysed in isolation, but rather interweavingly to identify their influence on my pedagogical practices and interactions in my professional space.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach and was interpretivist in nature to elicit a great depth and exploration of meaningful data. Additionally, interpretivism shaped my epistemological stance that my experiences could be deconstructed and analysed through subjective perspectives. An autoethnographic methodology was used, which allowed for examining my relationships with others in relation to social conventions and perceptions. Autoethnography helped uncover the underlying tensions that exist between my professional and personal identities, which is a phenomenon reinforced by Yazen (2024), especially when foregrounding identities of marginalised social groups. Data collection involved thematic analysis of my reflective journaling, student feedback, teaching strategies and observations through structured reflections. Through the autoethnographic methodology, I critically deconstructed the multifaceted nature of my gendered, cultural and professional identities and considered how it informed my pedagogical considerations and interactions with my colleagues and students.

Results and Discussion

The findings and analysis of, have been organised according to the two main themes that emerged: firstly, an insight into my personal self, and secondly, the influence of my intersecting identities, and my personal self on my teaching of History Education.

An insight into my personal self

By drawing on my reflections, I present an insight into my personal identities which serves as the basis for informing my pedagogical considerations. I explore my personal identities of being a female, millennial, and person of disability.

Gender

Being a woman, historically meant being physically weak, mentally unsound and

emotionally distressed. Those stereotypes continue to plague some societies and are passed down from one generation to the next. Fortunately, I grew up in a family that was unconventional and did not conform to the gender norms of the then patriarchal society of the 1980s. While I make this claim, I was still inculcated into the traditional role of a woman – not by my family, but by the educational system. Gender roles were manifested in the subjects that were gender-based. For instance, at primary school, girls had to study Home Economics while boys studied Handwork or Woodwork. In high school, Home Economics was again, a compulsory subject in grades 8 and 9, while boys were allowed to study technical drawing.

Moreover, with regards to sports, netball, volleyball and gymnastics were reserved for girls; while boys engaged in cricket and soccer. While such differences were taken for granted when I was younger, I am now aware of the specifically tailored curriculum for each gender. By studying Home Economics, girls would know how to maintain a household: cook, bake, sew and knit. On the other hand, technical drawing, Handiwork or Woodwork would help develop skills for a potential career in engineering. Despite such disciplinary disparities, women capitalised on their expertise and became entrepreneurs and successful business women. As I reflect on my tertiary education and professional experience, I was fortunate to be part of a transformative system that acknowledged gender equalities and attempted to provide equal opportunities for women and men.

Age

Beyond my gender, I am a tricenarian, meaning that I am in my late thirties and an older member of Generation Y. Generation Y are also known as millennials who were born between 1981 and 1996. As of 2025, this generation now ranges between 29-44 years of age. I am chronologically located between Generation X (1961 – 1980) and Generation Z (1997 – 2012), indicating that I lived during the age of print media and digital media. Professionally, this helps me develop a working rapport with my peers and my students. Being schooled within the apartheid and democratic systems in South Africa, epistemically located me in a position to effectively instill the

values of tolerance and respect under the auspices of the evolved democratic curricula – from Curriculum 2005 through to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), and the present-day Curriculum and Policy Statement (CAPS). In the past, there existed the notion that people are generally carefree and reckless in their twenties. However, with millennials, we were focusing on being employed, often preferring to work beyond our set work hours, and trying to maintain a healthy income in our twenties. We did not always achieve our objectives which left us in constant pursuit of stability, as opposed to the Gen X's pursuit of happiness, and the Gen Z's pursuit of comfort.

As a millennial, my technological experience extends from analogue to digital, and in time, artificial intelligence. To put this into perspective, at primary school teachers sometimes accompanied their notes with audiobooks (similar to audio podcasts) via a cassette tape, and we were shown educational films, such as *Sarafina*, via a video tape. At the secondary level, learning was conducted primarily through teachers' notes, school textbooks, and the eminent scholarship of the World Book Encyclopaedia, with the occasional viewing of an educational film, such as *Hamlet*, on a compact disk, commonly known as a CD. At the tertiary level, I was a novice at utilising internet resources, saving work on floppy disks, and consulting software, such as Encarta, on a DVD. Presently, the once invaluable information on the cassette tapes and disks cannot be accessed except through special converters.

Disability

Being physically or mentally challenged is not always easy, especially when teaching children and young adults. I have lived with epilepsy, a neurological disorder which results in seizures, for over 31 years; yet every time I enter the lecture room, my anxiety levels increase causing me to worry about how my seizures will affect my students. Over the years of teaching at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of the education system, I have tried to work on various techniques to help place my anxiety at bay. While I have to some extent, tried to 'manage' my anxiety, I also have to consider how my disability

may affect my students. My previous experiences of having seizures in the classroom, have taught me that I have to prepare my students ahead of my epileptic episodes. This means that at the beginning of every semester, I inform the students that I am epileptic, I explain what that means and what my typical seizure looks like. I then tell them what they can do: keep calm, do not move and if they are uncomfortable, they may look away. By making the students aware of this, I prevent panic on the side of my students, and avoid the uncertainty that comes with not knowing what to do in such a situation. While my disability may appear unsightly, it is part of my identity and as a lecturer I have embraced the effects in the lecture room and in my professional space. In doing so, I emancipate myself from the negative stigma of having a disability, and have developed a greater sense of confidence in my interactions with my students and peers.

The influence of my intersecting identities, and my personal self on my teaching of History Education

My personal identity undeniably informs my pedagogical considerations, whether intentionally or subconsciously. Through an analysis of my reflections, three sub-themes emerged. These were curriculum design, technology-based approaches and inclusive student engagement.

Curriculum design

Curriculum design is a complex process which considers the learning process, disciplinary content, and ways to actively engage students to develop historical literacy (Harris & Reynolds, 2018). The content I teach at the tertiary level is primarily based on prejudices, war, industrialisation, modernity, and technology in History Education. By default, I engage with stereotypes, biases and discrimination of local and international minority groups. However, when synthesising the content for each course, I begin with the learning objectives for the course and for each topic.

When designing my curriculum, I take into account “History Wars”, which refer to the controversies regarding the socio-cultural pasts of groups of people that are depicted when studying

history (Taylor & Guyver, 2012, p. xii). For instance, the experiences of the disabled during wartime in developing countries (Erevelles, 2020). Little is known about the accounts of disabled soldiers during the Anglo-Zulu war. Similar to the Jewish, the disabled were subjected to the heinous inhumane negative eugenics practices in Nazi concentration and death camps (Baker & Wynia, 2022; Chelouche, 2022). Thus, when designing the curriculum for my courses, I carefully reflect on whose and which histories to include so as to ensure a holistic historical understanding of events and actors that influenced and were influenced in the past.

I draw upon shared public memories and have my students critically explore sub-groups, and not to uncritically believe the meta-narratives that exist around them. For example, I discuss aspects in Emily Bridger’s 2021 book titled *Young Women Against Apartheid: Gender, Youth and South Africa's Liberation Struggle*. The book is based on oral history and speaks to narratives such as the voices of young and middle-aged women, generational divides, military action and liberation. By highlighting such narratives, I provide my students with the platform for unpacking different historiographies and developing their own historical understanding. My experience of interacting with classes of Gen Zs differed from Cickovska (2020), whose study reported that teachers considered their Gen Z students to be passive and non-responsive. Having said that, I teach classes with over 600 students, and while not all students contribute, there is a fair number who actively engage in class discussions. The rest do, however, voice their opinions through the written tasks.

My intersectional identity helps me identify readings and supplementary materials relating to the under-discussed or underexplored experiences of sub-populations based on gender, disability, nationality, race, age and religion, among others. For example, I use a prescribed reading when teaching about ‘Eugenics in Australia’, *Towards the decolonisation of disability: A systematic review of disability conceptualisations, practices and experiences of First Nations people of Australia* by Puszka, et.al (2022). Additionally, a prescribed reading when I teach ‘Eugenics in Germany’, is *German*

science and black racism – roots of the Nazi Holocaust by Haas (2008). By making this conscious effort include such readings, I am an active agent in deepening my students' historical understanding that people do not necessarily fall with one population category, and that marginalised voices extend to people with intersectional identities.

Technology-based pedagogical approaches

Given my extensive experience with evolving technologies, I am keen to try new developments, especially in my lectures. In South Africa's transformative HE landscape, I work at a university that has access to the latest technologies to give students the best possible learning opportunities. Students who I currently teach are part of the Generation Z (commonly known as Gen Z), and are considered digital natives, indicating that they learn best via digitally innovative resources (Hernandez-de-Menendez, et al. 2020). Taking this into account, I design my course material with the digital native student in mind, and by establishing and implementing strategies to evaluate and assess students' historical literacy and skills. I facilitate theory and content in interactive and engaging ways that prompt my students to become active participants who are eager to contribute to their own learning process, instead of dreading the information-loaded, teacher-led lectures.

I use various teaching methods and resources to teach my different course content, which include audio, visual and textual resources. The technological resources used in my courses include gamification, film, documentaries, praise poems, song analysis and social media. I also encourage students to critically engage with different technological software including internet resources such as History.com and YouTube. Examples of the online resources include: *How Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Organized for Nuclear Disarmament* on History.com, and *Mau Mau: Recalling women's participation and persecution in the struggle for Kenya's independence* on YouTube. Other platforms include WhatsApp, Microsoft packages such as Teams, PowerPoint and Movie Maker (Videos), Moodle and Zoom. The use of the aforementioned methods and resources are used to teach History to

help students relate to, develop and expand their critical thinking and emotive skills. Through these methods, I encourage active student participation, multiperspectivity and empathy skills; to ultimately enhance their historical consciousness.

Given that I teach classes of over 600 students, it is not administratively viable (or environmentally-friendly), to print the course material. Therefore, I had to be creative in ensuring equal accessibility to the course notes, learning material and activities. To do this I upload the material and make video recordings of my lectures. This not only saves time, money and the environment, but it also allows the students to access their course material digitally, anywhere and at any time. This idea ties in with Rahayu (2020), who asserts that Gen Zs operate best in an unrestricted, digital space, meaning that if I want to keep abreast of the current digital and AI trends in academia, I have to engage in constant research about those platforms.

Inclusive student engagement

My disability helps me identify potential learning challenges which I may not have otherwise considered. The importance of identifying students' intelligence type is echoed by Şener & Çokçalışkan (2018), who believe that in doing so, lecturers can design teaching and learning material that can help all learners achieve the learning objectives of the lesson. For instance, when preparing my lecture notes, class tests and PowerPoint Presentations on paper-based or online platforms, I use large texts and visuals. This is to ensure clear readability of the content for visually impaired students. In doing so, I am in turn setting an example for my students who are pre-service teachers. I see evidence of this when I assess them during their Teaching Practice sessions where some of them consider the font and format of the written texts that they present to their learners. This means that my practices are acknowledged, and that I am developing empathy in my students – a key concept in history and as a responsible citizen of the world.

Furthermore, to cater for students with multiple intelligence types, I structure my lectures differently in an attempt to cater for all types of intelligences. This means that I include group

work, discussions, debates, seminar presentations, and poster presentations to maximise student interactions and foster collaboration. This structure is also a break away from the monotony of teacher-led lectures, and it provides opportunities for students to meet the learning outcomes in ways other than written work. An example of seminar presentations focuses on photovoice as an emancipatory methodology. In this assignment, students have to capture photographs of what or who they consider as representing marginalised populations. This assignment has yielded several thought-provoking photographs including a graveyard, colonial statues, a flight of stairs with no wheelchair ramp and a South African bible that respectively speak to issues of classism, racism, ableism and homophobia¹. Through such assignments, students have identified evidence of historical injustices in the contemporary societies and how suppressive structures such as colonialism continue to shape the world.

To accommodate the students from different socio-cultural backgrounds, I include oral history, in the form of praise poems, proverbs, adages, art and sculptures. This not only acknowledges students' cultural backgrounds, but reinforces a sense of pride in the students' Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Additionally, I also draw upon social media as a database for different perspectives of diverse cultures. While such perspectives are subjective and not necessarily credible, I use them in my lectures for students to deconstruct and critically analyse. This enhances multiperspectivity and historical literacy. This approach has proved interesting because the students come to lectures ready to discuss how popular culture has neglected the original socio-cultural symbolisms. For instance, Rastafari dreadlocks are in fact a political and cultural symbol referring to the Ethiopian soldiers' defiance against the Italian invaders in the 1930s. The soldiers chose not to cut their hair as a symbol of not conforming to the European society, and resulted in a sense of apprehension among the European invaders (Wilson, 2025). Furthermore, dreadlocks are a symbol of spiritual attainment

(Chawane, 2014), and Afrocentric pride (Navei, 2025). Despite its rich historical symbolism, dreadlocks in media are associated with the Rastafarianism, but lacks the acknowledgement of the strong underlying motifs of anticolonialism and religious autonomy.

In keeping with the discussion of popular culture, I found that it often results in a conceptual and communicative disconnect between my students and me. For example, when discussing Cecil John Rhodes under the section of colonialism in Africa, a student stated that Rhodes should be "cancelled". In my academic journey I had never before heard that a person could be 'cancelled'. I asked the student to clarify what they meant and, in simple terms, the student believed that the Rhodes should not be given as much focus as he currently does in the school curriculum. Since then, I pay particular attention to the language and discourses on digital platforms, and research the popular cultural norms to ensure generational inclusivity.

The above findings indicate that my identity as a female, millennial, epileptic, does influence my pedagogical considerations as a lecturer. My intersectional identities influence my personal self by shaping my choices regarding curriculum design, technology-based approaches and inclusive student engagement. as I actively seek ways to accommodate people of disability, women, and different generations.

Through the analysis of my experiences, I concur with Dutra (2025), who states that reflective praxis entails an interplay between of the reflections and consequent actions that arise from the individual's critical awareness of themself. Similarly, I discovered that my active engagement with reflective practice supported Machost & Stains' (2023), claim that education researchers could benefit from reflections as they critically engage in challenges and developing ways to address them. Subsequently, I present a model that I developed by critically engaging in autoethnographic methodology.

¹ The author is currently in the process of writing a paper on the application of the photovoice methodology in History Education

A model for coping with negative stigma at HEIs

By analysing my experiences, I developed a model that could potentially help female, disabled lecturers, irrespective of age, cope in the HE spaces. The model which I entitle,

A Coping Model for Socially Stigmatised Sub-Groups (CMSSS) in Higher Education, draws upon three key aspects. These are critical dialoguing, mindfulness, and pedagogical choices. These will be unpacked below.

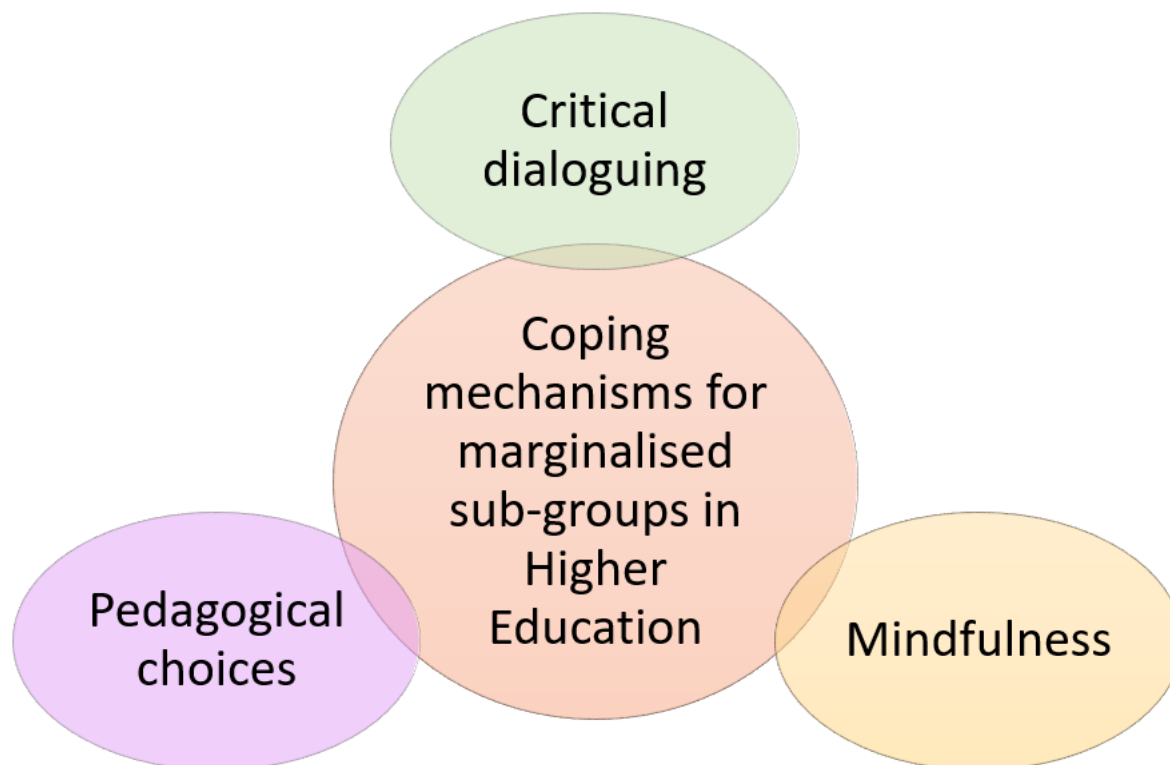


Figure 1: A Coping Model for Socially Stigmatised Sub-Groups (CMSSS) in Higher Education

Critical dialoguing

The importance of open dialogue cannot be understated, whether it is discussing issues of disability, gender, ageism, social injustice, or any other matter one may be affected by in the lecture room. Such dialogues should ideally exist at institutional and class room levels to bring awareness to the masses and to support the affected individuals. Despite the increased efforts to curb prejudice, being physically or mentally challenged continues to bear a negative stigma of weakness and inability. However, I believe that it is a privilege working with youth, especially in the capacity as a lecturer or teacher, because one has the opportunity to speak directly to them about issues of social justice and equality. This sentiment correlates with Pillay, et al. (2024), who states that dialoguing initiates action which could be encouraged through simple yet effective changes

such as prescribed course material, and increased inclusion and diversity in courses.

Mindfulness

Empathy is an important concept in History Education; however, before a lecturer teaches the skill, it would be helpful if they first develop empathy for themselves. Mindfulness, could be a way to achieve this sense of empathy, and to cope with the social stigmas. For instance, a study by Amaoyne, et al. (2024), highlighted that mindful practices increased lecturers' resiliency to challenges and their overall well-being in HE. In my experience, the significance of a sound mindset should not be discounted. Acknowledging one's achievements, no matter how small, is the start of developing a healthy mindset. It is also imperative to reward one's achievements. Such achievements could be recognising one's contribution to their family, their self-determination, their willingness

to defy society's negative stigmas, or even celebrating the fact that one was able to come to work to fulfil their duties as a capable lecturer. Mindfulness would not only focus on oneself, it would also consider their responsibility as a lecturer and the crucial role that they play in empowering their students. Part of mindfulness is engaging in constant reflective praxis, including the successes and challenges in HE, and how they responded to them.

Pedagogical considerations

In keeping with the importance of reflections, they are an important tool to help identify significant events that could prove beneficial or detrimental to one's experiences and development in HE. While recognition by peers and management yield workplace satisfaction, the contribution the lecturer makes to their students should also be celebrated. An integral part of being an academic is to lecture, mentor and support students. This means that a substantial amount of time must be spent planning for the pedagogies that will be used during lectures. Such pedagogical planning should consider technology integration in the course. In a post-COVID-19 world, for instance, blended learning approaches are used to cater for students with disabilities such as visual impairments, which would otherwise not have been used if not for the need for online learning as a result of the pandemic. Additionally, as recommended by Gravett et al. (2024), lecturers should capitalise on students' learning preferences based on their daily practices. For instance, Singh & Meena (2024), state that youth in the contemporary world spend most of their time on digital platforms for educational purposes. This implies that lecturers could ideally use these digital platforms, such as social media, to maintain a sense of interest in topics, especially pertaining to issues of sexism, agism, ableism, etc.

It must be noted that the Coping Model for Socially Stigmatised Sub-Groups (CMSSS) is exploratory and subjectively based on the deconstruction of my experiences. Researchers could modify this model to align with their experiences in the various HE contexts.

Conclusion

Through an autoethnographic study, this paper deconstructed the complexities of my identity as a University lecturer who is a female, millennial, and epileptic in HE. As a lecturer with the aforementioned intersectional identities, I believe that I am more cognisant of the need to represent marginalised groups which are often overlooked. By including the voices of marginalised sub-groups, I embrace my students' perspectives in the context of a multitude of historiographies. Furthermore, the contributions and struggles of the marginalised are shared with the students which helps develop a holistic historical understanding of historical events or actors.

The negative stigmas that exist about the disabled and women, have unfortunately filtered from Eurocentric thought through to the present-day. The choice of how one, with marginalised intersectional identities, copes with the stereotypes is ultimately left up to them. Irrespective of the 'bad days', when one feels that their abilities as a lecturer are undermined due to their disability, age or gender, they must focus on the 'good' they do for themselves and their students, while developing a support system of peers and students who one can trust when feeling at their most vulnerable and triggered by the negative stigma attached to their sub-groups.

Additionally, I consciously draw upon my intersectional identities to help students understand the complex histories of people from all walks of life. In an attempt to develop a historical consciousness in my students, I try to be inclusive in my curriculum design, innovative technological pedagogy and student engagement. Ultimately, lecturers who are influenced by negative social stigmas may draw upon my Coping Model for Socially Stigmatised Sub-Groups (CMSSS) to help them cope with the challenges they may face in HE.

Disclosures

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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