



## Audism

### The issue

Audism occurs in all levels of government and society in the form of direct, indirect, and/or systemic discrimination and discriminatory behaviour or prejudice against Deaf people.

### CAD's position

Audism is as unacceptable as sexism, racism, ageism, and other forms of bigotry.

Many Deaf Canadians experience prejudice and discrimination because of their differences from the non-Deaf majority. Much of this discrimination arises from ignorance or thoughtlessness. Much of it is institutional, systemic, and/or attitudinal. None of it is acceptable.

Audism can be seen in two general aspects. One is the assumption or belief that people who are deaf must be encouraged (or even forced) to become as much like non-deaf people as possible. The other is to assume control over deaf people, to disempower them, by making decisions about their language(s), their education, the services they will need, and so on, with limited or no input by the D/deaf person and the Deaf community.

The assumption that D/deaf people must become like non-Deaf people involves a repudiation of Sign language and the Deaf culture, a fixation upon "overcoming" the deafness, zealous promotion of "hearing" and speaking, and a pathological attitude towards deafness. It also implicitly includes the belief that a person who cannot hear is ipso facto inferior to those who can.

The second aspect of audism -- i.e., the seizing of control over deaf people -- has been summed up by Dr. Harlan Lane with the simple statement, "Hearing people have enormous control over the lives of Deaf people." For example, non-Deaf people make the decisions about the language choice, educational options, service provision, employment, and other aspects of a deaf person's daily life. Non-Deaf people at television stations, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), and creative production companies decide whether or not D/deaf people will be allowed access to television and movie/DVD programming through the provision of captioning. Non-Deaf people authorize building codes, architectural standards, and safety rules that decide whether visual alarms and "Deaf-friendly" building structural standards will be provided to Deaf people. Non-Deaf people at telecommunications companies, the CRTC, and public spaces (e.g., shopping-mall owners) decide whether Deaf people will be provided with accessible public phones. Deaf people are not allowed the same power to make or influence decisions concerning their own lives that non-Deaf people routinely enjoy.

It is important to add that people who are themselves D/deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing may exhibit audist tendencies, too. They may have internalized the audist assumptions that bombard them every day of their lives. People who have been made to feel inferior because of their deafness may find the only way they can feel good about themselves is to turn around and oppress or disparage other D/deaf people.

Barriers exist in the expectations and behaviours of employers, educators and service providers. The fact is that deafness is not a disease, a disorder or a health impairment, nor is it a threat to the health and safety of others. For example, research studies have shown that Deaf drivers have better safe-driving records. Yet, even an organization as presumably enlightened as the Canadian Medical Association has taken the position that hearing loss poses a threat to safe driving. Ironically, this same Association reported that non-Deaf drivers have high rates of car accidents because of listening to music and using cellphones. Their assumptions about Deaf drivers, versus their facts about non-Deaf drivers, are a blatant example

## Deaf Issues

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- Cochlear Implants
- Deaf Culture vs. Medicalization
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- Employment and Employability
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- Human Rights
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- Income Tax, Customs Duties, and Postage Rules
- International Concerns
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- Physician-Assisted Suicide / Physician-Assisted Dying
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- Statistics on Deaf Canadians
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of attitudinal and factual discrimination -- in other words, audism.

Deaf employees generally have better punctuality and attendance records in the workplace than their non-Deaf counterparts. Their workplace safety record is no worse than that of non-Deaf employees, particularly where simple precautions or accommodations are implemented. For example, visual emergency alarms benefit everyone, not just Deaf people, and are rarely if ever a significant unrecoverable cost. Yet many employers continue to assume workplace safety will be compromised by Deaf employees, or that deafness somehow leads to high absenteeism and tardiness, and that accommodation is too expensive.

Canada does not lack services or educational programs for Deaf people; the problem is that these programs and agencies are dominated by non-Deaf people, some of whom may impose their own non-Deaf behaviours and expectations upon their Deaf clientele and co-workers. The sincerity or "good intentions" of non-Deaf service providers and educators is not in question; many have proven they can work with Deaf personnel on a basis of mutual respect and cooperation. The real issue is why services for Deaf people are not provided by -- controlled by -- Deaf people and Deaf organizations themselves.

Many non-Deaf people look at the occasionally weak writing skills of Deaf people and assume they are illiterate or unintelligent because of their deafness. The truth is that for many Deaf people, written/spoken language is a second language, and they may not even have been provided with a sufficiently strong grounding in their first language, which is visual. Prejudice and discrimination against visual languages such as ASL and LSQ -- one of the clearest forms of audism -- have profound effects upon all language acquisition.

We are often told that "Deaf people must become skilled in English/French (not Sign language) because when they grow up they will have to function in the hearing society and need English/French to find jobs, find happiness and have a full and useful life." By that measure, blind people must learn to see, because when they grow up they will have to function in the "seeing society". Wheelchair users will have to learn to walk because they will grow up in the walking society. Developmentally-disabled people will have to learn to "smarten up" because they will grow up into the non-developmentally-disabled society. And girls will have to become men because they will grow up to take their place in a patriarchal society!

If Sign language is so evil that it must not be taught to deaf people, then why do the same schools that refuse to teach it to the Deaf have no troubling thoughts about teaching it to non-Deaf high school and adult students? Why do medical professionals and early childhood educators campaign against teaching Sign to deaf children, yet enthusiastically support teaching it to non-deaf children because it has been proven to accelerate brain development and to overcome other kinds of communication disabilities such as autism? Why do bilingualism (English-French) advocates push vigorously for non-Deaf infant second-language training, at the same time the audist establishment pushes vigorously for teaching Deaf infants only non-Sign language? The answer to all these questions is simply: audism.

The Canadian Association of the Deaf calls upon all levels of government, service agencies, Deaf education programs, professionals serving the Deaf community, the media, and organizations of the Deaf across Canada to work together to eliminate audism through education, training, and policy development aimed at eliminating defamatory beliefs, false assumptions, and dehumanizing stereotypes about Deaf people.

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