

ANNUAL PSA DAY  
CONFERENCE  
OCT 21, 2022  
Morning Workshops



9. MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY: EMANCIPATORY OR OPPRESSIVE? (AM)

Mental health literacy (MHL) coaches schools to “read” human distress and difference through psychiatric diagnostic classifications—ADHD, PTSD, ASD, and so on. When we switch lenses and texts and instead begin to read/interrogate MHL through scientific, sociopolitical, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist critique, we find that MHL cannot maintain its status as a progressive anti-stigma campaign.

MHL decontextualizes, individualizes, depoliticizes, and commodifies student distress. Psychiatric assessment and diagnosis, promoted through MHL, can produce unwanted financial, professional, and legal consequences at various junctures throughout the lifespan.

This set of morning and afternoon workshops summarizes key critical analysis regarding misinformation and potential for harm articulated by academics, patients, ex-patients, and professionals. The afternoon session continues from the morning session, concluding with a brief case study of a feminist medical and counselling clinic in Manitoba that has, for the last five years, been building their own anti-oppressive informed choice alternative to mental health literacy assumptions practices.



**Jan DeFehr** (MSW, PHD) lives and works as an uninvited white settler in the territories of the Anishinaabeg, Nêhiyawak, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene, and Métis peoples, in Treaty One territory. As such, she participates in decolonial land back work. An associate professor in the University of Winnipeg faculty of education, Dr. DeFehr’s teaching and research focuses on dialogic social inquiry intended to build public access to the critical mental health knowledge that is routinely omitted by mental health promotion courses, campaigns, and services.