

Cassie Fischer

Deaf Studies Final Paper

Deaf Culture Vs Hearing Culture

This Deaf studies class has taught me a tremendous amount about the Deaf Community and Deaf culture. I have learned so many different aspects that go into the different cultures and how different the hearing culture versus the Deaf culture is.

Throughout many generations deafness has been thought of as a disability, but hearing people are the ones who have mostly created this stereotype. Some hearing people feel that deafness needs to be “fixed” and that deaf children need to be more included in the “hearing world” so they will have a “better lifestyle”. When hearing parents have deaf children, they are told that they should be pitied for the struggles they will have to go through for the rest of their life. Although deaf children will most likely have a harder time fitting in, they are not lacking anything different from a hearing child other than the fact that they cannot hear. One of the major ways to involve your deaf child and make them feel included is to get involved with the Deaf community.

The Deaf community is a supportive and safe environment for deaf children who are not living the “normal life”. Growing up hearing, we as hearing people, feel that we will have more opportunities in life such as jobs, promotions, and all round a better way of life. When in reality it is not that way at all. Although Deaf people are not always given the same opportunities or jobs, they are still able to complete the same job as a hearing person. Deafness is not a disability or a way of life, it is just a loss of hearing. A quote from Thoman Holcomb says, “When they look at themselves in the mirror, they do not

see a disability. When Deaf people congregate among themselves, they do not feel disabled. Yet, society has consistently viewed deaf people as disabled” (Holcomb pg.4). This quote clearly explains how today's society views the deaf community.

The cultural differences between Deaf culture and Hearing culture are very different. Although the Deaf community is relatively all Deaf people, there are some circumstances where a hearing person will be allowed to join. In this case they will receive the title “HEARING-BUT”. People who receive this title must have “exhibited a positive attitude toward Deaf people and a deep respect for Deaf culture in general”(Holcomb p.48).

Throughout the Deaf community there are terms and labels given by Deaf people only. For instance, the term “Deafies” is often used among Deaf people when referring to their own kind”(Holcomb p.53). There are several labels given and used in the Deaf community, but there is one specific term the Deaf strongly discourage and dislike. The term “hearing-impaired” is the major term that is strongly disliked in the deaf community.

The term “hearing-impaired”, which is considered derogatory to the Deaf community is commonly used by hearing people. Deaf people do not feel impaired in any way, shape, or form. This term is used in today's society quite often by hearing people who do not know the difference between Deaf and “hering-impaired”. The hearing world is so involved within themselves that they do not take the time to understand or realize what the Deaf community or culture is.

Hearing people often live their lives as members of multiple communities. As hearing people it is much easier for them to be involved in the subcultures of America, such as athletics, choir, and different types of clubs that require specialized knowledge

or skill. The Deaf community is one way the Deaf are able to feel comfortable and welcome, but they find it is more difficult when wanting to be a part of another community outside their own.

Culture around the world has so many different involvements. Deaf culture and hearing culture are both very different in the way we interact with each other and go about our daily life. But there are many other cultures around us that we do not realize exist. "By general definition culture can be described as "The system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation through learning"(Bates & Plog, 1990, p.7, Holcomb).

In the book we have been reading "Introduction To American Deaf Culture" they talk about the five hallmarks of culture. The Five Hallmarks of Culture are the primary inclusions within the culture such as, language, heritage, symptoms, arts, and family or "culture players". "Through these five hallmarks, the silent aspects of a community are identified and reflected"(Holcomb pg. 17).

In the United States newborns are taught to be independent as soon as they are brought home from the hospital. Whereas In other cultures around the world they are taught to rely on each other in their family. Many cultures have what is called the "family bed". This is where the family, no matter how many children you have, all sleep in the same bed or at least share the same room. This is unusual to someone who does not live this way, but can be an eye opener to see what other parts of the world are truly like and how different people are within cultures.

In 1989 Dr Jerome Shein proposed the ninety percent formula to show the percentage of deaf children and hearing parents. It states that, “90 percent of the deaf people are born to hearing parents, with recent studies showing the figure to be close to 95 percent (Michell & Karchmer, 2004b, Holcomb). “Ninety percent of these parents have had no experience with deaf people prior to giving birth to their deaf child”(Holcomb pg. 39). Reading this ninety percent formula made me realize how many deaf children were deprived of their own language and culture from such a young age. I had not realized how many hearing parents had no idea of the Deaf community and Deaf culture. I was surprised to learn that so many hearing parents do not know how to communicate with their own child. The book states that “Ninety percent of hearing parents are unable to communicate efficiently with their deaf child” (Greenberg 1980; Swisher & Thomas, 1985, Holcomb). These statistics were very hard to comprehend, as a hearing person talking ASL. I could not fathom not being able to communicate with my own child because they were deaf.

In “Introduction To American Deaf Culture” Roy K. Holcombs, who is the author of the book “Hazards of Deafness”, speaks about his goal to create new insight on the Deaf community and the uniqueness of American Sign Language. As talked about during our class lecture, in the past generations, experiences with Deaf culture were not always the most pleasant. Most people in the hearing community did not believe in the use of sign language. They believed that Deaf people should only use verbal or lip reading as their main communication source. As you can imagine, being Deaf and not able to use “your language (Sign Language)” can be very difficult and sets you back in not only communication, but your education and learning as well.

The communication process throughout the years has impacted the way hearing and deaf people communicate. Before communication was made easier, deaf people had a very difficult time communicating with others who were not deaf. Whether it was over the phone or through long distance communication deaf people were unable to communicate easily. They did not have the resources or luxuries that we have today with facetime or video chat.

Several presentations done by my fellow peers/classmates talked about the oppression and lack of communication for the Deaf. Most of the artists and musicians talked about during class such as Nancy Rourke, Betty G. Miller, Chuck Baird, and Matt Daigle used their artwork and music as their escape. For example: Nancy Rourke is a deaf artist who had no form of communication for the first six years of her life. This was because her parents did not know she was deaf until she reached the age of six. While learning this information it was shocking to me knowing how difficult it must be for Deaf children to understand what was happening in the world around them. Especially not being able to communicate with sign language makes it much more difficult and frustrating for both the deaf and hearing person as well because neither of them know what each other wants. ASL is a major part of the Deaf community and needs to be taught to others so they understand and are able to at least communicate with another deaf person, that way they would not be misunderstood.

After listening and watching the presentations about the different Deaf artists and musicians this allowed me to have more respect and understanding for the Deaf community. Living in a "hearing world" as well as being a hearing person, I do not think about or realize the difficulties Deaf people go through on a daily basis. In chapter five,

it talks how parents of Deaf children feel that this is a disability and their child is now “not normal” and they want them to “be fixed”. To me Deafness is an opportunity to share with others the different ways of life and that not everyone’s “the same” in every way. Even if you are Deaf you are still able to do the same things as hearing people. I was also able to learn and have a better understanding about the different forms of De’VIA, which are affirmative and resistive art.

Affirmative art can be done by either a Deaf or hearing person as long as it includes the deaf culture and has a positive connotation towards the picture or painting. Deaf artists who paint affirmative artwork show the beauty of Deaf culture and that they are proud to be a part of the Deaf community. On the other hand there is resistive artwork. Resistive artwork reflects the negative aspects of Being Deaf and the Deaf culture as a whole. Artists who paint resistive art show the downside of being Deaf and what it feels like to be left out of everyday conversation. For example: a painting named “The Family Dog”, painted by Susan Dupor, was to demonstrate the way a Deaf person feels within the family or at family functions. While the Deaf child is lying on the ground like the family dog, the hearing people’s faces are blurred out so the child cannot see what they are saying. When the child signs the family congratulates the child with a “good boy or good girl” to show that they used sign language. To me, sign language should not be used as a form of “good boy or good girl”, but should be treated just the same as any other language such as Spanish, French, English or German etc..

Learning about the different Deaf artists made me realize how difficult it can be to live in a world where you are not accepted for being yourself. Because of this unacceptance in the “hearing world” the Deaf community has a very tight knit

connection. Because of this, Deaf clubs were becoming more popular, which meant that the Deaf community could join more frequently and feel more welcome within their culture.

Deaf clubs were very popular and were bringing a lot of different people together to be able to share with one another their difficulties and similarities. They would gather, play games, and meet up at the same location on a specific day. The Deaf loved these gatherings because it gave them something to look forward to throughout the week. They were able to connect with other people just like them and feel comfortable in their skin. The Deaf clubs became a major part of the Deaf community and even brought in enough revenue to pay off mortgages in a short amount of time. Not only was this just a way to get to know other Deaf people, but this was their form of entertainment. These Deaf clubs were formed for entertainment and allowed Deaf people to enjoy things they could not enjoy on a normal basis such as: television shows, movies, music etc..

The clubs would have captioned movies and television shows that were funded federally. Card games and other board games are also provided and played during the clubs as another form of entertainment. "Card games, dart competitions, and other social activities provided Deaf club goers a much-needed respite from the everyday tedium of strained communication with hearing people "(Holcomb 224). Although Deaf clubs were such a big part of the Deaf community back then, Deaf clubs have almost become extinct in a way. Many Deaf people do not join in "Deaf clubs" anymore; they would rather meet at a bar, restaurant, or any other facility and hang out. "Deaf clubs are fast disappearing from the Deaf culture sense, they still doggedly hang on in a few

locations” (Holcomb 225). This is sad to think that they will eventually no longer be a thing because of the close connections they made with the Deaf community.

Another very interesting topic discussed by our lecturer was the different phonemes in ASL. The phonemes include: Handshape, palm orientation, location, movement, and non-manual signals. I knew most of these coming into the Deaf studies class, but I did not know exactly what they meant and why they were used. One of the main people we talked and learned about in class was William Stoke. William Stoke was the first person who systematically studied sign language. He was the one who coined the term American Sign Language and Amesian. William Stoke insisted that instead of phonemes, he would call them “cheremes”, which stands for cherology (hand). William did this because he felt that in American Sign Language you do not use your mouth as your main communicator, you use your hands.

I learned a plethora of new information about the Deaf culture and community. While we learned about the different mouth morphemes, ASL noun-verb pairs, morphemes, phonemes etc.. I did not know that linguistics also was involved in American Sign Language as well as other speaking languages. Currently I am in a Linguistics class and we have talked a lot about similar aspects. To the way your mouth is formed/shaped to make sounds, to the way your hands move to show the different signs being signed in ASL. For example: Balance, if you flip both hands upwards it becomes “maybe” which is a minimal pair. Palm orientation is dedicated to the sign to show what you are saying, but in order to follow the correct format you need to watch your palm ordination as well as your direction and location etc..

Reading the book also gave me more insight on the Deaf culture by teaching me that Deaf people are also included in politics. Deaf people are politically active and give their own opinion about the rights they should have to a community and culture. I did not know this before reading the chapters and I was very intrigued by this information.

While it is very hard to live life without proper communication, there are ways to enhance your hearing. Such ways are cochlear implants, hearing aids etc.. A movie called "Sound and Fury" that we watched in class had great examples of what to do if your child wants or does not want implants. The movie also talked a lot on the differences between a mainstream school, verbal schools, and an all deaf school that only uses ASL to communicate.

During the movie "Sound and Fury" there were many different views on whether or not a profoundly deaf child/person should get a cochlear implant. For instance in "Sound and Fury" the Daughter of the Deaf parents was very hesitant on giving her deaf child the culturally Deaf life experience. She had two sons, who were twins, one was hearing and one was deaf. The mother felt that because her son was deaf she needed to fix his hearing so he would be able to live a more "normal" life just like his twin brother. He would be able to communicate with other people better and have more opportunities with jobs/promotions in the future as he got older if he were to get the cochlear implant surgery. The mother felt that by having one deaf twin he would not have the same experiences in life as the other twin boy. She felt they would be treated unequally and given unfair opportunities due to his deafness and lack of hearing.

By giving her son a cochlear implant with knowing how the deaf people and culture would respond, she still went ahead with her plan and took the criticism. The

deaf community is not fond of this decision and will sometimes shun them away from the Deaf community. In this instance it was a difficult decision because one set of the grandparents were completely deaf and very involved in the Deaf community, whereas the other set of grandparents were completely hearing. In some circumstances when a deaf child is born the parents are very happy. If the parents are deaf they want their child to be born deaf as well.

In the movie the one family who has two deaf parents and three deaf children were willing to move states to be in a more culturally accepted environment, this is why they moved to Maryland. To connect between the movie and the book "Introduction to Deaf Culture", chapter thirteen also talks about the diversity in the Deaf community as well as the difference of being mainstreamed into a hearing society.

In chapter thirteen, "Diversity in the Deaf community", the concept of diversity is talked about in many different ways. For example, when we think of the word "diversity" we automatically think about the culture, race, religion, background, etc. about other people around us. But in the Deaf community diversity stands for the uniqueness of levels at which people can hear. Some may be profoundly deaf and can not hear a single sound, whereas others may have slight hearing loss and can only hear sounds, but not words.

In chapter thirteen it states, "The Deaf community is diverse in more ways than just various racial, religious, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. Within the Deaf community are members with different levels of hearing, different personal histories, associated with sign language usage, different educational and communicative backgrounds, different degrees of parental acceptance and support, and different

degrees of identification with other Deaf people” (Holcomb p.268). This quote was very interesting to read because growing up I never understood the difference between being Deaf and hard of hearing. Now knowing the difference between Deaf and hard of hearing allows me to have a better understanding of the Deaf community.

If I were to have a deaf child I would personally give my child the opportunity to be involved in both the hearing culture and the Deaf culture/community. I would want my child to have a stable communication tool and language from the start and be able to have the choice when they get older. I would want them to have the choice to either use both American sign language and Speak, only use American Sign Language, only speak, or to use their cochlear implants or not at all.

I want my child to grow up in a community that expects them for who they are and that is why I would give them the opportunity to do both. The deaf child has nothing to lose and can only gain from this opportunity. For example in the movie, the one littler who was born profoundly deaf to hearing parents was an incredible speaker. If you were in the hearing world you would have no clue she was born deaf with the way she spoke and listened. I feel that giving your child the cochlear implant will give them more opportunities in life. I feel that by teaching your child American Sign Language from birth will give them a stable language to go off of when they begin to learn english.

Reflection

Before taking this Class and being in the hearing community I personally did not think about the Deaf community and how difficult it is for them to communicate. I never really understood the controversy between the hearing and Deaf communities. I feel

that not only do deaf people have to figure out certain ways to communicate and get their point across, but they also have to find a way to be culturally accepted. This is very difficult for the deaf because they are always out of the loop and feel like they do not fit in since the world we live in is mostly a hearing community.

In the class lecture we learned about how they would tie deaf children's hands so they could not use sign language. This to me was very shocking as I could never see myself even involving myself with such a thing. If I were to have a deaf child, I would want them to be immersed in both the hearing and Deaf community along with culture. If my child were to have an option for a cochlear implant I would implant them as young as they can, but also teach them sign language as well. As I grow older and figure out what I want to do in the future as I graduate, I will forever take the things I learned from this class with me. I hope to someday help the Deaf community by making it more inclusive with the hearing community. I want to be able to inform others who are hearing and do not know about the Deaf community and Deaf culture. I want to inform them so that they will know how to handle certain situations when an interpreter should be involved and what to do if a deaf person does not understand etc...

The Deaf community is a big part of this world that a lot of people do not even know about. I want to help others learn about the Deaf community and Culture so that someday the people I teach will help spread the word and give more people the opportunity to feel welcome/understood. I am still not exactly sure what I want to do with my career path yet, but I would like to incorporate my knowledge of American Sign Language and Deaf culture. Whether it's in the medical field, school organizations, public events, I want to be able to share and educate the people around me. Deaf

people deserve to be treated the exact same way as hearing people even if they need an interpreter. For example: when a hearing person who is a native Spanish speaker comes to the United States and needs an interpreter, this is the same concept for deaf people. The only thing different about the Spanish or ASL interpreter is that getting an ASL interpreter is much more difficult. ASL interpreters need to be booked in advance whereas a Spanish translator you can find more easily.

I can imagine how frustrating it must be for deaf people to live in a “hearing” world and not be understood on a daily basis. Although I may not be deaf or hard of hearing, I feel that I can relate on a level to some of the deaf and hard of hearing people with the communication portion. A while back I was in Spain for the first time. I was very confused when walk up to me and started speaking spanish. I was frustrated that I could not communicate or understand them, but I had to find a way to at least show them what I wanted. Learning this new information from this class has given me the point of view from a Deaf person's perspective when not being able to communicate easily with others.

I feel that when deaf children are born they are given so many ultimatums and told they have a “problem” from the beginning. Not giving your child the best care they need to succeed is setting them up for failure. I want to be able to help hearing parents who have children and allow them to see the beauty in being deaf. I do not want the parents to only think about the negatives. I want the parents to know that they do not have to listen to doctors' full advice. Some doctors who speak with the parents are not educated on the Deaf community and culture and simply tell the parents to implant their child and start to “speak” to them. By simply implanting your child and teaching them to

speak and understand/learn a vocal language can be very difficult. It is not very common for a deaf child to begin "hearing" again such as talking and listening etc..

Although I do feel that giving your child the cochlear implant will give them more opportunities in life. I feel that by teaching your child American Sign Language from birth will give them a stable language to go off of when they begin to learn english. A couple years ago I would have chosen to pick the cochlear implant for my child as well as put them in an all hearing school. This is because I did not know the importance of language loss at a young age and how it would affect the child's development in their later years of learning. Learning now the importance of having a stable language at a young age, I would not only teach my child American sign language, but I would also implant them as well.

Starting at such a young age will help the child develop stronger skill sets rather than being deprived of a language and being set back. For a young deaf child, I feel that mainstreaming with no sort of English background will most definitely be a setback for the child. I know I would try my best to help my child be bilingual at a very early age in order for them to not lose any years of communication or education. I do not fully understand why a parent of a deaf child would want their child to suffer from lack of language. I would want my child to thrive in both language and education. I personally feel that American Sign Language would definitely be their first language that way they are not deprived of a language.

I want to teach other people around me who do not know the severity of language and education deprivation within the Deaf community. I want to educate them that deaf people can learn just as well as hearing people. You might have to put more

time and effort into learning a new language such as ASL to communicate, but this will be so much more beneficial than trying to get a profoundly deaf child to “listen”. Hearing people need to be taught about the Deaf culture and that deaf children cannot just be “fixed” by implanting them or by making them “listen”.

If I were to have a deaf child I would personally give my child the opportunity to be involved in both the hearing culture and the Deaf culture/community. I would want my child to have a stable communication tool and language from the start and be able to have the choice when they get older. I would want them to have the choice to either use both American sign language and Speak, only use American Sign Language, only speak, or to use their cochlear implants or not at all.

I want my child to grow up in a community that accepts them for who they are. The deaf child has nothing to lose and can only gain from this opportunity of being able to have an implant as well as learn Sign Language. For example in the movie “Sound and Fury”, the one little girl who was born profoundly deaf to hearing parents was an incredible speaker. This does not happen to everyone. People believe that once you are implanted you will hear again, which is not the case for everyone. If you were in the hearing world you would have no clue she was born deaf with the way she spoke and listened.

Sources

Holcomb, Thomas K. *Introduction to American Deaf Culture*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2013.

Weisberg, Roger. *Sound and Fury: The Communication Wars of the Deaf*. Filmmakers Library, 2000.