

Assignment #1a
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July 10, 2008
EPSE 317
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Deaf Culture

What is deaf culture?

According to the web site aslinfo.com (n.d.):

“Carol Padden has defined Culture as a set of learned behaviors of a group of people who have their own language, values, rules of behavior, and traditions.” (1988)

Culture results from a group of people coming together to form a community around shared experience, common interests, shared norms of behavior, and shared survival techniques. Such groups as the deaf, seek each other out for social interaction and emotional support.

The essential link to Deaf Culture among the American deaf community is American Sign Language. This community shares a common sense of pride in their Culture and language. There exists a rich heritage and pride in the ability to overcome adversity as individuals and as a group. (p. deaf culture)

Persons who are deaf do have a culture or community that they belong to and as would be expected many but not all items that define other cultures of the hearing are also part of the deaf culture. The first and most important part of the deaf culture is the American Sign Language (ASL). Second is the deaf communities history and finally the arts of the deaf community. This will be a very brief look at the deaf culture and will give you the reader a glimpse of a proud and strong community of people that see their deafness not as a disability but as a difference.

The language is what truly defines the culture of the American deaf community. The American Sign Language (ASL) is rich with resources: the internet, books. If you look on the internet and type in any of the following: deaf culture, ASL, deaf, there are 100's of sites listed and the sights are of a very high quality offering all kinds of methods of teaching and learning the language. They offer high quality graphic drawings or actual pictures of individuals' hands as to how to sign the language. There are very high quality videos that show not only the hand movements but also the importance of signing with

the body and facial expression. They sell signing books, flash cards, videos and DVD's for all ages and levels of proficiency. The language is particularly suited for children to learn, hearing or non hearing. Recently there has been a push to teach hearing babies sign language before they can speak orally. Why, because a lot of frustration that the baby goes through hearing or non hearing is because they can not communicate their needs to others. If they are taught sign they can sign well before they can speak orally. Thus frustration due to poor communication is limited. In fact the terrible twos may disappear if your child is taught sign. Try it go to ASLPro (n.d.). They have many of the classic children's stories in book form or even some on video take a look at the 3 little Pigs Maxwell (n.d.). As with any language it is continuously developing and has variations determined by gender, region racial/ethnic and age, Sign Media (n.d.) "The sign languages of deaf people are true languages and must be given the same status and respect as any other language." The Canadian Association of the Deaf (May 26, 2007).

The history of the deaf community has contributed to its culture. The deaf history is one of great struggle to be given simple human rights. Their history began with the deaf being seen as the result of sin they were thought to be incapable of reason or thought and were therefore given limited rights to marriage. At certain times in their history they could have no property, contracts or have wills. As time progressed the deaf became more educated and began self advocacy through their organizations and individuals. Laws began to be made that gave the deaf rights that they should have always had; such as, in "1992 the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) put into law, protecting the right of the disabled to education, employment, accessible buildings, and other reasonable accommodations." Gallaudet University Archives (2005). They have gained many rights

and are still fighting for more. Before ASL was used there was an indigenous or natural sign language developed by deaf people. These natural indigenous languages were mixed with sign language developed by the hearing that were brought from France to America. In 1817 the first American School for the Deaf is founded by Mason Cogswell, Thomas H. Gallaudet, and Laurent Clerc. From here it developed into the American sign Language we see today.

Finally a culture needs to have arts that celebrate its history, language and community. The deaf community has movies, music, poetry, plays, comedy and art. I was surprised to here that the deaf have music. How can they here the music? Music to the deaf is feeling the vibrations but also music for the eyes watching the beautiful art of signing music. Glennie (2007), Elfpuck (2006) or Rily (2007). Jokes are also part of their culture Vicars (n.d.)

A husband and wife went to the doctor. [The husband is hard of hearing]
The doctor says to the wife, "You've got to do 3 things to keep your husband well."
"1st you got to keep everything real clean and smooth. You got to iron everything."
"2nd you got to fix him fresh meals every day from scratch. No left overs, no fast or frozen foods."
"3rd you got to give him more lovin."
They get home and the husband asks, "Well what did the doctor say?"
The wife looks at him and responds, "You're going to die."(15 More "Lovin")

The deaf community shares many aspects of its culture that the hearing culture do but the most important aspects of the deaf culture are its language, history and art. Although we only had a glimpse of the deaf culture I hope this glimpse will help you as it did me in understanding the individual who is deaf a bit better.

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