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Who Decides for Us, Deaf People?

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14 Who Decides for Us, Deaf People?

Helen R. Thumann and Laurene E. Simms

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine certain perspectives and present a defensible analysis of the research that has shaped the destiny of a people who are categorized by society-at-large as being “disabled” or “hearing impaired”: the Deaf. Specifically, this chapter attempts to compare educational and social research emerging from pathological versus cultural viewpoints. Given our identities as members of the Deaf community and culture, fluent American Sign Language (ASL) users, former teachers of Deaf children, and current faculty members of Gallaudet University’s Department of Education, we have observed and experienced how Deaf people and the Deaf community have been viewed and regarded as “less than.” By deconstructing the patriarchal assumptions of Deaf people as deficient, we will address implications of viewing Deaf people through cultural and sociolinguistic perspectives versus medical perspectives. Our intent is to depathologize “Deafness” by showing how a lack of cultural recognition has influenced research on Deaf people. Finally this chapter will discuss implications for researchers when the Deaf community is recognized as a linguistic and cultural minority with a rich and unique heritage that is just as valid as the mainstream culture in which they are expected to try to participate.

Anthropologically, heritage and cultures cannot be rated as one being more or less superior than another. In this view, the difference between Deaf and Hearing people can be seen as cultural differences, not as deviations from a Hearing norm (Woodward, 1982). This also represents a development in research toward the understanding of Deaf society and culture in the United States and toward an understanding of why Hearing society in the United States has been so slow to give up the idea of “Deafness” as a pathological condition and Deaf people as handicapped or disabled individuals.

Historical Treatment of Deaf People:
Pathological View versus Cultural View

Pathological View

Historically, Deaf people have been viewed through the lens of a medical model and therefore have been labeled as deviants with a pathology (i.e., hearing loss) that must be remediated. This pathological perspective has shaped Deaf education for several centuries and is an outgrowth of more general beliefs about people who are different, which has resulted in labels such as “normal” for those who are not perceived to be disabled versus “handicapped” for those who deviate from the medical model’s standards. This view has historically been held by the majority of able-bodied persons who interact with disabled people and parallels how other language minority people such as Native Americans and
Mexican Americans have been viewed in the educational system (Ballin, 1930; Davidson, 1996; Lane, 1992; Spindler & Spindler, 1990). The widely held majority view that Deaf people have a medical problem has prohibited the acceptance of American Sign Language as a separate language from English and Deaf Culture as a culture separate from the majority culture (Lane, 1992; Woodward, 1982). The underlying principle of this pathological view is to “fix” Deaf people and Deaf children in particular. The pathological view perpetuates the belief that the ultimate educational goal for Deaf children is to “pass as Hearing.”

Deviation from the norm is likely to entail a stigma (Baker & Cokely, 1980; Lane, 1992) which in turn serves to reinforce the paternalistic and patriarchal, colonial assumptions of the political and economical elite (Reinharz, 1992). Critical theory (Freire, 1992; Wink, 2000) challenges these traditional Western assumptions and permits one to deconstruct the pathological view and demonstrate its similarity to patriarchal assumptions found in many other situations involving majority/minority interactions (Woodward, 1982).

However, up to now, critical theory has not impacted the pathological/clinical views of Deaf people held by the Hearing culture. At the 1880 Conference on the Education of the Deaf in Milan, Italy, the pathological view was codified in the field of Deaf education when Hearing participants voted to forbid the use of sign language in the education of Deaf people. This decision not only forbade the use of sign language in schools, it also led to the expulsion of Deaf teachers from classrooms (Gannon, 1981). Prior to this conference about 50% of the teachers of the Deaf in the United States were Deaf (Gannon, 1981). One can still see the long-lasting impact of this decision when looking at the current percentage of Deaf teachers, roughly 16% (Andrews & Franklin, 1996–1997). This numerical change has resulted in Deaf people having practically no input into how Deaf children were and continue to be educated. The central idea put forth at the conference was that speaking, referred to as oralism by the Deaf community, was superior to manual communication or sign language. As a result, school policies and questions about which method of communication to use in the classrooms for Deaf children have been continuously and heatedly debated over the last 170 years. The pathological view has been perpetuated by researchers and educators who have attempted to understand how Deaf people differ from Hearing people and then to provide remediation to eliminate these differences; that is, to have Deaf people communicate orally rather than use sign language.

As we argue in what follows, society’s view of the Deaf is pathological; the Deaf self-view is cultural. The pathological view has carried over time to influence: (1) education and language planning for Deaf children; (2) training of teachers of the Deaf; and (3) educational and social research involving Deaf children and adults. The origin of this pathological view can be discovered by analyzing the historical treatment of Deaf individuals, and other individuals, who are “different” for whatever reasons, by the Hearing society at large.

Society’s view of the Deaf is an outgrowth of more general binary beliefs about people with differences; for example, “normal” vs. “handicapped.” The pathological/clinical view takes the behaviors and values of the majority as the “standard” or “norm” and then focuses on how disabled people deviate from the norm. This view has been historically and traditionally held by the majority of able-bodied persons who interact on a professional basis with people with disabilities. This deviation from the “norm” is likely to entail a stigma (Lane, 1992), which in turn serves to reinforce the patriarchal, colonial assumptions of the political and the economical elite (Reinharz, 1992). Ladd (2003) in defining the colonization of the Deaf community, explains that the Hearing majority colonizes the Deaf community linguistically (as opposed to economically) by imposing...
Table 14.1  Chronology of the Historical Treatment of Deaf people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>355 B.C.</td>
<td>Aristotle says those “born deaf become senseless and incapable of reason.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800 B.C.—500 A.D.</td>
<td>Deaf newborns in Greece and Sparta were cast out in pursuit of being “perfect, normal, and healthy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 500 A.D.</td>
<td>In Christianity, people believed that Deaf individuals were possessed by the devil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1485</td>
<td>Rudolphus Agricola (1443–1485) wrote about a deaf-mute who learns to read and write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576), the first physician to recognize the ability of the deaf to reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600s</td>
<td>Juan Pablo Bonet (1579–1620) published the first book on education of the deaf in Madrid, Spain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Wallis (1616–1703) published <em>De Loquela</em>, reported to be the first publication describing a successful method for teaching English and Speech to deaf children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johann Amman (1699–1724), a Swiss medical doctor developed and published methods for teaching speech and lipreading to the deaf called <em>Surdus Loquens</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1755</td>
<td>Samuel Heinicke (1712–1790) establishes the first oral school for the deaf in the world in Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles Michel Abbe de l’Epee (1712–1789) establishes the first free school for the deaf in the world in Paris, France.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800s</td>
<td>On Martha’s Vineyard Deaf and Hearing people use sign language to communicate with each other on a daily basis, even during business hours (Groce, 1985).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>The first permanent school for the deaf was founded and taught by the first Deaf teacher, Laurent Clerc, in Hartford, Connecticut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840’s</td>
<td>William Willard, Deaf founder of the Indiana School for the Deaf and graduate of the American School, documented his early analysis of sign language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Congress founds Gallaudet College (later University) as the first institute of higher education for deaf students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Birth of the National Association of the Deaf and Deaf Movement; Conference on the Education of the Deaf in Milan, Italy where Hearing participants voted to forbid the use of signs in the education of Deaf people threatening the learning freedom of deaf children and the employment of Deaf teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Gallaudet College adds teacher training program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>William Stokoe’s research provided evidence that American Sign Language (ASL) is a true language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>The first Deaf president of Gallaudet University, the only Liberal Arts University for deaf and hard of hearing students, was selected. This marks a significant milestone in the civil rights of deaf and disabled individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990’s</td>
<td>Birth of the Bilingual/Bicultural educational movement using ASL and English in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Gannon, 1981.
“the colonizer’s language (in this case English)...on the colonized” (p. 25). Conversely, the cultural view focuses on the language experiences and values of a particular group of people who happen to be different from the “norm.”

This brief chronology shows a gradual shift from viewing Deaf people as “incapable of reason” to capable of learning, and most recently, capable of leading. The pathological/clinical views of Deaf people held by the Hearing culture seem not to have changed significantly over time while the views held by the Deaf Community have changed to a cultural perspective. The most explicit example of this progression can be taken from the history of Deaf Education in the United States.

Oral versus Manual Controversy

School policies and questions about which methods of communication to use in the classrooms for Deaf children have been a subject of controversy over the last 170 years. Until the late 1960s, the debate over language use in teaching had always been between the proponents of the oral (spoken language) method and the manual (sign) method. In 1817 the first school for Deaf children in the United States was founded in Hartford, Connecticut. Students were taught by a Deaf teacher, Laurent Clerc, who used sign language as the method of communication. The trend toward oralism was codified by the 1880 Conference on the Education of the Deaf in Milan, Italy where Hearing participants voted to forbid the use of signs in the education of Deaf people. Gannon (1981) explains that Deaf people are still smarting from the indignity they suffered at that international meeting in 1880 which banned the use of sign language in the teaching of Deaf children and led to the expulsion of Deaf teachers from classrooms. As a result, Deaf people had practically no say in how Deaf children were educated. The oral method of teaching quickly became widespread across both the United States and Europe. The shift to oralism had a profound impact on Deaf teachers, who were considered inferior speech models for their students. Prior to the Milan Conference in 1880, about 50% of the teachers of the Deaf were Deaf. Today only 11% of the teaching force is Deaf. The oral-only method continues to be greatly favored as the method of instruction in the United States and worldwide (Nover, 1993).

Efforts of Alexander Graham Bell

Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone, which was intended for his Deaf wife, was one of the biggest proponents of the oral movement. In 1883 he presented a paper, “Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race,” before the National Academy of Science in New Haven, Connecticut. Bell wrote, “Those who believe as I do, that the production of a defective race of human beings would be a great calamity to the world, will examine carefully the causes that lead to the intermarriages of the deaf with the object of applying a remedy” (cited in Gannon, 1981, p. 75). He would have razed all residential and day schools for the deaf. Bell believed that “herding” Deaf children under one roof was a cruel thing to do. He broached the possibility of forbidding Deaf–Deaf marriages by law arguing that such marriages would produce Deaf offspring (Gannon, 1981, pp. 75–76). Years later, Mindel and Vernon (1971) challenged Bell’s theory by demonstrating that 90 to 95% of Deaf people are born of “normal” Hearing parents and have Hearing children.

George W. Veditz, a Deaf teacher and former President of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), a political organization, called Alexander Graham Bell the American most feared by Deaf people, saying “…he comes in the guise of a friend, and [is], there-
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fore, the most to be feared enemy of the American Deaf, past and present” (quoted in
Gannon, 1981, p. 77). As a result of the oral movement, which was greatly influenced by
Bell, the manual (sign) method was banned from the classroom and the Hearing perspec-
tive dominated the education of the Deaf.

Recognition of American Sign Language

By the 1960s the majority of Deaf schools in the United States and worldwide employed
the oral method for educating Deaf children. Children who were unsuccessful using the
oral method and communicated using ASL were seen as failures, regardless of their intel-
lectual ability. In 1960 William C. Stokoe was the first non-Deaf linguist to apply lin-
guistic science to the study of ASL. He recognized ASL as one of the legitimate human
languages. (Only recently have universities, such as the University of Arizona, accepted
ASL as fulfillment for the foreign language requirement for graduation.) Also during the
1960s, the Civil Rights Movement, along with advocacy and community groups such as
the National Association of the Deaf and Deaf Pride, spurred government action target-
ning the Deaf and other “handicapped” groups. These groups used ASL as their symbol
of Deaf pride and culture in order to campaign for “Deaf awareness/heritage” as well as
greater government action in an area where, up to then, little attention had been paid.
Recognition of ASL as a language as well as the political empowerment of the Deaf
community renewed the struggle for the power to decide their language. However, Hear-
ing, nonnative ASL-using educators still dominate the educational process and seriously
affect the lives of Deaf children by denying them the use of ASL in the classroom.

ASL versus English-Based Sign System

The oral–manual controversy moved into a new phase in the 1970s. The issue moved
from whether or not to sign with Deaf students to what kind of signing to use. Rather
than make use of ASL, groups of researchers and educators (primarily Hearing) cre-
ated “English-based sign systems” which attempted to make spoken English more visible
(Stedt & Moores, 1990). This exemplifies how control of language policy has been in
the hands of nonDeaf professionals. The use of ASL was seen as insufficient and ineffec-
tive for teaching Deaf children. Bornstein, Hamilton, and Sornier (1983) make this view
clear:

Can most deaf children get enough information from these signals (ASL) to learn
English well? The answer to this question is a clear and very well documented no.
Most deaf children do not learn English well, recent surveys of the educational
achievement of older deaf children indicate that, on the average, they equal the read-
ing performance of hearing fourth or fifth graders. Not all deaf students do that well.
(p. 2)

Since Stokoe’s demonstration that ASL is indeed a true language, more and more
signed-language researchers and scholars have made significant contributions to the
study of language acquisition. In addition, a number of books on sign languages such as
ASL, French Sign Language, British Sign Language, and others have appeared along with
a myriad of Deaf-related books on such topics as linguistics, sociolinguistics, language
acquisition, second language learning, English as a second language (Andrews, Leigh,
& Weiner, 2004; Chamberlain, Morford, & Mayberry, 2000; Ladd, 2003; Lucas, 1989,
Unfortunately, the outcome of the 1880 Milan Conference still profoundly affects daily life in the American Deaf community. Prejudice and discrimination were inherently expressed by parents as well as non-Deaf educators in the decision made at the conference to forbid participation by Deaf educators. The ideas put forth at the conference, that is, that oralism is superior to manual communication, fosters the illusion that Deaf people are in agreement with the concept that every Deaf child should be given a chance to be like a “Hearing, normal child”; this classic bias against ASL is a clear formulation of the hegemony of English and an English-based manual system promoted in schools for the Deaf (Bornstein et al., 1983).

The history of Deaf education indicates that audism, in which a higher value is placed on Hearing and oral/aural perspectives and parallels ableism (Lane, 1992), hearization, which is similar to assimilation in nondominant communities, and domination significantly affects the educational and linguistic lives of Deaf people. An examination of the parties who are playing significant roles in the development of Deaf education reveals exactly what ideology controls this institution. In addition, history indicates that those in Deaf education have not been effective in addressing the concerns of the Deaf community regarding Deaf education (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996). Language planning is still under the control of Hearing educators. In recent years, some programs, such as Texas School for the Deaf, New Mexico School for the Deaf, Metro Deaf School in Minnesota, and Marathon High School in Los Angeles have adopted a bilingual and bicultural approach. Yet, they are still very controversial and do not easily replace the institutionalized Hearing orientation to Deaf education.

Where do Deaf people stand now? What has been the impact of this history on Deaf education and the quality of life for Deaf children? Where do Deaf people begin the “attack” to change this situation? Unfortunately, the pathological perspective is much more deeply ingrained in the Hearing world than we may realize. It pervades the foundations of education and research.

Pathological Perspective Maintained Through Education and Research

In Nover’s (1993) discussion of the current state of the education of the Deaf, he points out that most textbooks used in training programs for teachers of the Deaf are written by those who view Deaf people as outsiders and who believe that Deaf children and adolescents should behave like Hearing persons. These courses include many terms that denote pathology, such as: Hearing impaired, special education, disorders of the language development, diagnosis, correction, improvement, hearing loss, and adaptations of regular curriculum. Nover further explains that a majority of the courses represent the promotion of an English-only philosophy, which is auditory-based, along with a pathological orientation toward Deaf children. He found that classes could be categorized into three areas: English-only centered orientation (75%); Deaf-centered orientation (e.g., those emphasizing ASL; 12%); and nonrelevant (13%).

Nover (1993) argues that a Deaf-centered orientation would include, for example, courses such as teaching English as a second language, teaching reading skills in a second language, second language writing, language transfer, ASL literature, Deaf culture, Deaf history, cross-cultural issues, bilingual education, and first and second language acquisition and teaching.

The majority of researchers who conduct various studies on the Deaf community have been trained and exposed only to literature that emphasizes the English-only, pathological, and non-Deaf orientation. The pathological perspective is still being perpetuated in
the majority of teacher training programs as well as by many of the researchers who study Deaf people.

There is a growing number of researchers who have conducted their research from a Deaf culture perspective. The following section will compare several researchers from both the cultural and pathological perspective in order to clarify the differences between the two groups.

**Research in the Field of Deaf Education**

For nearly 200 years the focus of research and education has been Deaf children’s inability to hear. From this pathological view, social scientists like Alexander Graham Bell, Bornstein, Ling, and others have looked at Deaf people as a deviant group with hearing loss and they have consistently compared Deaf students to Hearing “normal” counterparts. To study how one becomes “deviant,” social scientists assign labels to demoralize a particular group or individual when behavior is marked as abnormal (Gamson, 1991). Thus, such social scientists who study Deaf people make it clear that Deaf people are not normal and are categorized as deviants from the Hearing society because they do not possess what Hearing people possess: the ability to hear. Gamson and Schiffman point out that the attempts to use labels of abnormalities foster the process of stigmatization (Burawoy et al., 1991). Social scientists assign such labels to Deaf people, and thereby continue to control the stigmatizing and demoralizing power over Deaf people.

Further, in Lane’s book, *The Mask of Benevolence* (1992), he argues that so-called “experts” in the scientific, medical, and education fields, while claiming to help Deaf people and their community in fact do them great harm. In other words, social scientists look at themselves as the experts on Deafness while Deaf people see themselves as inferior and are “trained” to become dependent on Hearing people. The majority of the social scientists with the colonizing and pathological attitudes toward Deaf people are still making decisions about Deaf people and enabling the Deaf to depend on them because of the hold over and control they have over so many aspects of the lives of the Deaf. Lane (1992) argues that paternalism and money are inseparable in this transaction. For example, these social scientists with pathological views of Deaf people write the textbooks and materials for use in the teacher education programs for teachers preparing to teach Deaf children. The books on methods of instruction for the Deaf are written by researchers who in turn receive recognition for their expertise and profits for their work. Bornstein’s attitude about Deaf children can be seen in his text as he (1990) attempts:

> to offer an authoritative description of manual communication as it is used in the United States. It is designed for professionals who work with Deaf and language-delayed children and adolescents (including some who may hear). It should also be useful for teachers-in-training and interested parents. (p. 253)

Students in teacher preparation programs are taught a pathological view through the books written by Hearing researchers. When these students become teachers of the Deaf, they bring attitudes and a mind-set that Deaf people are, to quote social scientists, “deviants.” The main point is that social scientists aim to maintain the professional authority over the description of education and communication. The focus is that the social scientists do not want to relinquish their power over Deaf people.

Thus, while numerous statistical and quantitative studies have documented the failures of Deaf students (Allen, 1986; Braden, 1994; Schirmer, 2003; Trybus & Karchmer, 1977) the work of these social scientists has been used to hinder advancement in
education of Deaf children by reinforcing the concept of ableism as well as disability. The pathological perspective is perpetuated in research being conducted by social scientists using traditional approaches from a Hearing orientation. Shapiro (1993) noted that in research nondisabled people use “prettifying euphemisms” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 33) and rely on the stereotype that disabled persons should be an inspiration in their efforts to overcome challenges. To the contrary, Blackwell (1993) in her narrative about her experiences growing up Deaf, considered herself not handicapped and was angry that Deaf people were allowed to believe they were handicapped. Bahan (cited in Wilcox, 1989) proclaims that it is the Hearing world that tells us we are handicapped and disabled. Educators trained to think of Deaf children as handicapped and disabled continue to lower the educational expectations and achievements of Deaf children. In turn, these attitudes encourage Deaf children to believe they are handicapped and disabled in the eyes of the majority of Hearing people and thus will never equalize themselves with Hearing peers.

In contrast to this mainstream view, the work of linguistic and anthropological social scientists in American Sign Language and Deaf Culture has facilitated new perspectives on Deaf people (Baker & Battison, 1980; Baker & Cokely, 1980; Erting and Woodward, 1979; Groce, 1985; Klima & Bellugi, 1979; Liddell & Johnson, 1989; Lucas, 1989; Padden & Humphries, 1988; Stokoe, Casterline, & Croneberg, 1965; S. Supalla, 1990; T. Supalla, 1986; Van Cleve & Crouch, 1989). Johnson, Liddell, and Erting (1989) noted that the low average academic achievement levels are not results of loss of Hearing or learning deficits inherently associated with being Deaf but with the problems in the communication practices of the students’ teachers. In her study on teacher communication competency, Baker (1978) stated that teachers using sign language and spoken English simultaneously did not provide comprehensive and complete linguistic input for Deaf children during the instructional time. In contrast, Moores (1991) wrote an editorial in the American Annals of the Deaf on teacher morale:

Teachers of the deaf typically deal with a situation in which their children have normal intellectual potential but academic progress is constrained by limited English and other communication skills. Teachers may see only small incremental growth in standardized test scores from year to year and may mistakenly, in my opinion, hold themselves responsible for what they perceive to be an unsatisfactory rate of progress. (p. 243)

Corbett and Jensema (1981) indicated that the majority of teachers of the Deaf were White, Hearing, and female. Teacher training programs offer courses from a medical perspective as illustrated earlier. Therefore, with the majority of White, Hearing females being responsible for the language and instruction of Deaf children, it is anticipated that those people are already trained in a pathological view of Deaf children. Hence, many educational programs for Deaf children described earlier are still employing old research theories regarding learning English as the first language and espousing a paternalistic attitude toward Deaf people.

In a survey, Woodward and Allen (1987) studied 609 elementary teachers. Eighty-five percent of this predominantly Hearing and female group had minimal skills in ASL. In general the research suggests that the educational programs for the Deaf are being dominated by Hearing educators whose communication has been shown to be insufficient as a means to convey information through instruction. Certified teachers of the Deaf may have had only two or fewer classes in sign language during their teacher education program (Maxwell, 1985). As a result, some Deaf children were put in the position of having to teach ASL to their teachers; therefore, the instructional time for Deaf children
often is replaced with teachers learning from the children. Additionally, when teachers (and future teachers) of Deaf children do know how to sign, often their ASL fluency is lacking.

One example of this occurred in March 1992. Gallaudet University placed four student teachers at a residential school for the Deaf in the Midwest where the Bilingual and Bicultural program is used. These four student teachers included three White Hearing women and one who identified herself as Hearing impaired. After observing these student teachers working with children in the class, the teachers and principal at the school determined that the student teachers’ sign skills were insufficient. As a result the student teachers were asked to cease their practicum at the school. After returning to Gallaudet they were transferred to another school, one that presumably had lower expectations of the sign skills of their teacher interns. This action helped to convince faculty and administrators at Gallaudet University to change its graduate studies program to include more cultural and linguistic aspects of Deaf people and require students to become knowledgeable and proficient in both areas before they could participate in their practicum. The faculty at Gallaudet changed the curriculum of the Deaf Education program to include a demonstration of sign proficiency for students planning to teach. However, state and professional requirements for obtaining a teacher’s license in Deaf Education include coursework that emphasizes the pathological view, not a cultural and linguistic view. In spite of new cultural and linguistic theories that emerged in 1960 and thereafter on ASL and Deaf Culture, only a few schools (e.g. Texas School for the Deaf, California School for the Deaf, Metro Day School for the Deaf) and universities (e.g., Gallaudet University, Lamar University, Boston University) have adopted a cultural and linguistic view as the basis for instruction and hire Deaf people who are trained as ASL and Deaf studies instructors.

Deaf People as Researchers

Lane (1988) proposed that psychologists involve Deaf people themselves at all levels of research undertaken. Deaf people need to be recruited and trained, and researchers should turn to the Deaf community as advisors and collaborators in collecting analyzing, interpreting, and disseminating results. Kurzman (1991) stated that the ideal is to give subjects a voice in the research; however, he warned that the complex sentences and eloquent works in the researchers’ writings may remind the subjects of their inability to communicate in the Deaf individual’s way. He suggests that we allow subjects to provide input to correct any mistakes the researcher might have made; to create a sense of cooperation between subjects and researcher in the quest to understand the subjects’ world; to empower subjects by making them active members in their own analysis; and to keep writings clear in order to keep the subjects’ possible reactions in mind as the research unfolds. Padden and Humphries (1988) note in the introduction to their book, Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture, that the traditional way of writing about Deaf people is to focus on their condition, the fact that they do not hear, and to interpret all other aspects of their lives as consequences of this fact. In contrast, a sociolinguistic or cultural approach to research focuses on “normalization” of Deaf people as a linguistic and cultural group.

Lane (1980) reviewed existing literature and found over 350 textbooks and reports that reveal paternalistic attitudes toward Deaf people. Though no similar study has been conducted on the research done on or about Deaf people, such a study would likely reveal the preponderance of Hearing researchers and few (though growing) numbers of Deaf researchers or Deaf/Hearing teams. The perspectives of Hearing researchers may differ
from those of Deaf researchers or even those of collaborative groups including both Hearing and Deaf researchers. If the number of research studies done by Deaf social scientists were to increase or surpass the number of studies by Hearing social scientists, would a Deaf perspective eventually reflect a new change in the picture of Deaf people?

Although an increasing number of Deaf researchers with higher levels of sophistication have contributed to the field, we still have to deal with enduring stereotypes, negative interpretations, and inappropriate pathological theoretical suggestions already imposed on Deaf people. When social scientists proclaim their theories, the results are often in conflict with a Deaf perspective. For example researchers continue to compare the English ability of Deaf children with Hearing children for reading and writing competencies, while they ignore ASL as literacy. So, the validity of tests and measurements in English for Deaf children is being challenged by the linguistic and cultural theories. What a researcher in one framework may consider to be problematic and require a remedial solution may count as healthy independence to someone looking from a different perspective. Researchers who hold pathological views would consider the importance of teaching English in the classroom to improve the linguistic and grammatical skills, whereas Deaf people find that they could achieve their learning of English through ASL. Lane (1984) adds “But the deaf did not have, do not have, the final word (in research). The final word as always came from their Hearing benefactors” (p. 413).

While some researchers have included Deaf people in their research (both as participants and collaborators) the involvement of those Deaf people has been greatly restricted. Kannapell (1980), a Deaf researcher in Deaf Studies, in discussing her experience working with Signed English developers (Bornstein et al., 1983) expressed that she was disillusioned by the oppression she experienced from the researchers with whom she worked. She eventually resigned from this work, after she discovered her identity as a Deaf person and began a new endeavor, establishing Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University where she retired as a professor. She was a pioneer in recognizing the ambivalence of Deaf people regarding their own identity and language, which was the subject of her doctoral dissertation. It is possible that Deaf researchers who collaborate with Hearing researchers are either not aware of their rights or accept the fact that they have little or no power over the work. Paternalism can corrupt some members of an oppressed minority, forming a class that conspires with the authority to maintain the status quo (Lane, 1992). Indeed, researchers are likely to approach Deaf people with paternalistic attitudes. The failure to involve Deaf people as active participants in research has been a longstanding issue. However, we are seeing more works of linguistic and anthropological researchers involving Deaf people as collaborative researchers, assistants, and subjects (L. Erting & Pfau, 1993; C. Erting, Prezioso, & Hynes, 1990; Lucas & Valli, 1990; Padden & Ramsey, 1997; T. Supalla & Newport, 1978). For example, in the 1990s two proposals for Deaf research projects were funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Both proposals were submitted by collaborative Deaf and Hearing researchers; Padden and Ramsey and Supalla and Singleton. Both worked with Deaf professionals at different residential schools for the Deaf. Additionally, research projects like the Signs of Literacy (SOL) and the Visual Language, Visual Learning (VL2) research projects at Gallaudet University bring Deaf and Hearing researchers together to examine issues of language development, education of Deaf children, and literacy.3

Reinharz (1992, p. 260) noted that feminist researchers draw on a new “epistemology of insider-ness” that sees life and work as intertwined. Feminist research aims at the following goals: “1) to document the lives and activities of women, 2) to understand the experience of women from their own point of view, and 3) to conceptualize women’s behavior as an expression of social contexts” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 51). The research on
women contributes significantly to rethinking perspectives of Deaf people. With this new influence on the Hearing perspective of Deaf people, the patriarchal attitudes and stigmatization of Deaf people can perhaps be eradicated. Researchers as experienced insiders are able to understand what Deaf people have to say in a way that no outsider could.

Reinharz also points out that there may be a danger of overgeneralizing women’s experiences when researchers fail to differentiate their own experiences from those of other women (p. 262). She suggests that feminist researchers include their personal experiences as an asset for their research, using objectivity and subjectivity to serve each other.

Anthropological research has shown diversity among Deaf people (Lane, 1992; Lucas, 1989; Padden & Humphries, 1988). Deaf researchers may already or will draw on their own personal and cultural experiences to do research, but at the same time carefully differentiate their own experience from the experience of other Deaf people (Kannapell, 1980; Stone-Harris & Stirling, 1987; Suppala, 1992). This is a departure from the traditional homogenizing model of Hearing researchers working on Deaf people and a new approach between Hearing and Deaf researchers as collaborators as well as the Deaf as individual researchers. This emerging trend (Andrews, Leigh, & Weiner, 2004; Kuntze, 2004; Ladd, 2003) will give the opportunity to bring in more Deaf perspectives than the traditional model and will offer more valid descriptions of Deaf people.

In order to depathologize the Deaf community and deconstruct the inherent patriarchal assumptions, it has become necessary to develop new strategies such as revising language and eradicating stigmatizing terms. Woodward (1982) discusses the commonly “take for granted” term, handicapped, and notes:

For if we look more closely at the notion of “handicapped” and its ramifications, we come to a rather unpleasant logical conclusion. The American Heritage Dictionary (1976) defines handicapped as a “deficiency, or especially an anatomical, physiological or mental efficiency, that prevents or restricts normal achievement.” (p. 133)

If we follow the traditional handicapped classification of Deaf people, they are doomed to failure because they will never achieve (nor do they always want to “achieve”) the “normality” of becoming a Hearing person. Most Deaf people will then remain deficient (i.e., according to Hearing society’s norms), that is “lacking an essential quality or element; incomplete; defective.”

Moreover, another controversial term, Hearing impaired, is for Hearing people, a more acceptable and tolerable term, but it is a euphemism for “Deaf.” The term Hearing impaired has a negative connotation and is no longer an acceptable usage among the World Federation of the Deaf and other organizations, such as the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Bienvenu (1989) points out that “Hearing impaired” defines Deaf people solely in terms of broken or defective ears and this term tends to be preferred by most of the professionals in the audiological and rehabilitation field who take a narrow medical view of Deaf people. Furthermore, Bienvenu challenges the lack of acceptance and misuse of the term Deaf as she asks; “Why is it so hard to accept the word ‘deaf’? Is it because it sounds like ‘death’ which is commonly misused by Hearing people?” (Bradford, 1993).

In The Bicultural Center Newsletter, April 1991, Bienvenu considers the use of the term Deafness (as in “the field of Deafness”) as equally ridiculous and a nonhuman entity. She notes that there is no such thing as the “field of womanness” for women and “field of blackness” for Black people (p. 1) but the “field of deafness” has been seen as acceptable. There is nothing horrible or undignified about the term Deaf, so no sophisticated or polite substitute is needed. Even that cringe-inducing term is less debasing than
non-Hearing. Perhaps the terms *Deaf* and *non-Deaf* should be something to consider (Bradford, 1993). Bradford further explains that in referring to Deaf people as “non-Hearing” is rather like saying “non-Whites” to describe Blacks; it appears to reduce Deaf people to a sterile, subaverage population.

From within the Deaf community, new vocabularies have emerged for shaping theories. Though many of these terms have been commonly used for several centuries by the Deaf, they need to be replaced for the aforementioned negative connotations. In order to promote better understanding and sustain an endogenous cultural view, the term *Deaf* is preferred over any other as a powerful term, presenting a positive identity, and as another way of being human. “Deaf” implicates a language and culture (Padden & Humphries, 1988). “Deaf” is inclusive. The entry “Deaf” reads in the American Heritage Dictionary of the English language (1992):

Adj. 1 Partially or completely lacking in the sense of Hearing. 2. *Deaf*. Of or relating to the Deaf or their culture. 3. Unwilling, refusing to listen: heedless: *was deaf to our objections*. N. (used with a plural verb). 1. *Deaf* people considered as a group 2. *Deaf*. The community of deaf people who use American Sign Language as a primary means of communication. (p. 368)

To contrast, from a Deaf perspective, ASL is considered as the primary, dominant language. English should be considered a second language for Deaf people in the United States (Grosjean, 1982). Furthermore, Nover and Ruiz (1992) contend that there is a great need to develop more Deaf-centered or Deaf-informed aspects among such disciplines as psychology, education, anthropology, sociology, and the like before researchers will have accurate and acceptable cultural information regarding Deaf people.

**Results and Effects of the Pathological View in the Education of Deaf People**

The historical treatment of Deaf people has resulted in a number of detrimental effects on the Deaf Community. To justify the need for a change in Deaf education, however, one only needs to look at a long list of studies by researchers in the field of Deaf Education (Allen, 1994; DiFrancesca, 1972; Hoffmeister, 2000; Padden & Ramsey, 1997; Prinz & Strong 1998; Traxler, 2000; Trybus & Karchmer, 1977; Vernon & Andrews, 1990). These studies showed that 30% of Deaf students in the United States left school functionally illiterate (at grade 2.8 or below on education achievement tests); 60% read at grade levels between 5.3 and 2.9 (DiFrancesca, 1972; Trybus & Karchmer, 1977); and only 5% achieved a 10th-grade level or above (Jensema & Trybus, 1978). Approximately one-half of Deaf high school students were unable to meet the academic requirements for a diploma, exiting instead with a certificate or less (Schildroth et al., 1991). Those who dropped out or aged out of high school programs accounted for 29% of those leaving while only 29% of Deaf students graduated with high school diplomas (Bowe, 2003; Schildroth et al., 1991). Students who did graduate often went on to be unemployed or underemployed when compared to Hearing counterparts (Garay, 2003; Punch, Hyde, & Creed, 2004).

This situation with the education of Deaf individuals has had a severe impact on their ability to make the transition from school to employment, and then to independent living. The importance of education was highlighted by Jones (2004) who found no evidence of significant differences in earnings between Deaf and Hearing individuals, except for those with lower levels of educational attainment. A series of surveys conducted by
MacLeod (1983, 1984, 1985) revealed employment trends among Deaf/hard-of-Hearing graduates of residential and mainstreamed public school programs. Persons responding to those surveys experienced rates of unemployment higher than the norm for Hearing persons; if employed, they typically found work in blue-collar occupations where they earned a lower salary, demonstrated little upward mobility, and tended to stay at the same job for a long period of time. Furthermore, Dr. Frank R. Turk, former director of North Carolina’s Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, claimed approximately 70% of the nation’s Deaf-school graduates receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). These poor educational and work history outcomes point to an ongoing crisis in the state of Deaf education in the United States.

After this long history of linguistic, cultural, and educational oppression and its resultant impacts on the success of members of the Deaf Community, a grassroots change began. This change, beginning in the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, had its roots in the recognition that the signs that Deaf people were using were not simply visual representations of the local spoken language but, in fact, consisted of a rich language with its own grammar, syntax, history, and culture. This recognition of ASL coincided with the Civil Rights Movement, and the sense of Deaf Civil Rights emerged. The resultant empowerment of the Deaf community sparked a change in how Deaf people saw themselves and led to a critical look at the educational methods used in schools and universities throughout the United States. This growing empowerment continued through the 1980s with the Deaf President Now movement at Gallaudet University. In the 1990s the ASL/English Bilingual Education movement began. These changes reflected a shift from a pathological to a cultural view of Deaf people.

Implications for Research

Through our discussion of opposing perspectives on Deaf people (cultural as compared to pathological), the resultant oppression of Deaf people, and the impact of that oppression on the education of Deaf and hard of hearing children, we have argued that there needs to be more Deaf influence and perspective in the education of Deaf and hard of hearing children. Though there is a growing movement toward ASL/English bilingual education, there continues to be a tremendous need for promoting more Deaf focused research in language use and planning, education, and culture. This research should include exploring the attitude and relations between non-Deaf professionals and the Deaf community in order to gain a better understanding and come to a resolution of this conflict of perspectives (Clifford, 1991; Nover, 1993). Kurzman (1991) notes that it is absurd for social scientists to debate subjects’ situations without letting them speak for themselves, even though it has been an historical reality for the Deaf community. For Deaf people to gain more control over the research on Deaf lives, the Hearing people in control should relinquish some of their power by hiring more Deaf researchers and collaborating with them when necessary, to maintain a Deaf perspective in their work. Deaf people should have the right to see and comment on Hearing researchers’ work especially in the early stages. Though not all perspectives can be addressed and satisfied by any one project, researchers will gain support from the Deaf community for their projects if the work is shared and criticized by Deaf people as part of the project itself.

Hearing social scientists hiring Deaf people only as assistants for their research perpetuate colonization and perpetuate the current power structure through dominant/dominated relationships. Also, “hiring” implies a power differential, that the Deaf people are doing the “dirty work” and that the research design is Hearing oriented. Collaboration of Deaf and Hearing researchers may contribute to an eradication of pathological views...
to develop relevant, explanatory theories uniquely fitted to what we are studying and to lived realities of Deaf people. Traditional, antiquated theories may explain a particular view of phenomena colored by biases of researchers. We need to refute these erroneous theories with valid arguments and evidence. Experts in the scientific, medical, and education establishments who purport to serve the Deaf in fact do them great harm when they address the realities of our lives, and portray Deaf people as disabled. Woodward (1982) points out that it is very improbable that Deaf people will even achieve equality unless the Hearing society depathologizes Deafness; that is, unless Hearing society rejects the handicapped classification of Deaf people. After all, Deaf people, like all other human beings simply want liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness.

Notes

1. Many authors use capital “D” Deaf to refer to those who are members of the American Deaf culture and lower case “d” deaf to refer to the audiological condition.

2. In using the term Deaf culture or Deaf community we do not mean to imply that all Deaf people believe, act, or support the same ideas and beliefs. As with any culture or community, the Deaf community is varied and diverse. With this in mind, however, interviews and research on identity in the Deaf community often find members of the Deaf community as identifying themselves first as Deaf. For example in a survey of Deaf lesbians, it was found that these women consistently identified themselves as Deaf first then as women or lesbians.


4. In 1988, the Board of Trustees at Gallaudet University selected Elizabeth Zinser, a Hearing woman with no experience working with the Deaf community, to be the President of Gallaudet. The two other candidates were Deaf men who had long histories of working both at Gallaudet and in the Deaf community. This resulted in a protest which included Gallaudet students, faculty, staff, as well as members of the larger Deaf community. The protesters demanded a Deaf president for Gallaudet and 51% Deaf representation on the Board of Trustees. After a week of protests the Board of Trustees chose I. King Jordan as the first Deaf president of Gallaudet. For a detailed account of the Deaf President Now Movement see Christiansen and Barnatt (1995) and Gannon (1989).

References


Who Decides for Us, Deaf People?


