

Deaf Culture



Researched By:

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I. Description of Culture

A. Demographics

- There are 20.3 million people with hearing loss in the U.S.(1-5% of these individuals identify themselves as part of Deaf Culture), 4.8 million cannot hear and understand normal speech.
- Hearing impairments are the 6th most common chronic condition in the US among civilian non-institutionalized population, 9 in 10 children born deaf are born to hearing parents.
- Hearing loss is greater in men, 12% of men age 65-74 are affected by tinnitus (more common in the South than in the Northeast).
- Hearing loss affects approximately:
 - 17 in 1000 children under the age of 18.
 - 314 in 1000 people over the age of 65.
 - 40%-50% of people age 75 and older have hearing loss.
 - 2-3 children in 1000 are born deaf or hard-of-hearing in the US.
- American Sign Language is the third most commonly used language in the US.

B. Deafness as a Culture

- A capital 'D' is always used to differentiate those in the Deaf Culture from individuals who are deaf.
- Only 1-5% of individuals who are deaf identify themselves as part of the Deaf Culture.
- The inability to hear is the basis to their distinct cultural group.
- To the Deaf community, deafness is by no means considered a disability.

Characteristics of a Culture as applied to the Deaf Community

Collective Name/Title:

- Deaf Culture
- Deaf World
- Deaf Community

Feeling of Community

- Individuals in the Deaf Culture feel a strong identification with their community and show great loyalty to it.
- Easy communication between members
- A positive identity
- The Deaf World has the highest rate of endogamous marriages of any social group, estimated at 90%

Norms of Behavior

- There are norms of relating to members within in the Deaf Culture.
- For decision making, consensus is the rule, not individual initiative.

- Managing information
- Constructing discourse
- Gaining status as a Culture
- Managing indebtedness

Distinct values

- Allegiance to the Culture
- Prizing one's relation to the Culture
 - Endogamous marriage
 - Gaining status
 - Giving culturally related names
 - Taking part in consensual decision making
 - Defining oneself in relation to the Culture
 - Treasuring the language of the Deaf Culture
 - Promoting culturally salient information

Knowledge

- Deaf individuals have cultural-specific knowledge.
- Knowledge of prominent leaders and their characteristics.
- Knowledge of the concerns of rank-and-file members of the Deaf Culture.
- Important historical events
- Knowledge of how to manage trying situations with hearing people.
- Knowing when and with whom to use American Sign Language and when to use English-marked varieties of sign language

Customs

- The Deaf World has its own ways of doing introductions and departures
- Specific ways of taking turns in a conversation
- Customs of speaking frankly and speaking politely
- Collective name customs
- Customs of kinship
- Customs of language

Social Structure

- There are many organizations in Deaf Culture.
 - Athletic
 - Social
 - Political
 - Literary
 - Religious
- Charismatic Leaders who embody characteristics unique to the culture.

Language

- Competence in ASL is a central aspect of Deaf Culture in the US.
- A language not based on sound is the primary element that demarcates the Deaf Community from the hearing society.

The Arts

- Language Arts
 - Narratives
 - Storytelling
 - Oratory
 - Humor
 - Small tales
 - Word play
 - Pantomime
- Theatre Arts
- Visual Arts
- Art of the Deaf culture address culture and political issues of the Deaf World

History

- Rich history recounted in stories, books, films
- Members of the Deaf community have a strong interest in the history of their culture.
- A sense of common history bridges generations

Kinship

- Residential schools provide a community to which many individuals in the Deaf Culture have the most connections and feelings of kinship toward other members of the culture.
- Travel is centered around visiting residential schools
- There is a strong bond between Deaf individuals of different cultures even though they share no common territory

C. Brief History

- Organized language for the Deaf community was formed in Paris in the mid-1700s by a French Priest.
- Prior to this there was a manual language of the Deaf community, but the Priest organized a more formal language and opened a school for the Deaf. Many of his students went on to open schools for the Deaf around Europe.
- Without communication, it was assumed that people who were Deaf were unable to learn or be taught.

D. Language/Communication

- American Sign Language (ASL) is a full rich language with its own grammar and syntax.

E. Education

- Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Governor Baxter School for the Deaf
- hear ME now!-
 - Children who are deaf or hard of hearing are learning to listen and speak at hear ME now!, Maine's first auditory-oral learning center

F. Annual Events

- Deaf Awareness Week, held the last full week in September. The purpose is to celebrate Deaf culture, heritage, and language.
- Maine's Deaf Culture Festival, held the last full week in September in Maine.

II. Social Norms

A. Initial Interactions

- Greetings within Deaf culture consist of using full name (first and last) followed by where person attended school.
- During interaction there is a strong effort to find out if each participant has someone from the local or national level that each knows.
- Affection in the form of hugging is often used in greetings or before departure.
- Touching during conversation is used to add emotion or emphasis to what is being communicated.

B. Honesty

- What hearing society views as “rude” Deaf people view as acquiring details.
- For example, it is not uncommon for a Deaf person to acknowledge if a person has gained weight

C. Communicating with Hearing People

- Usually able to distinguish if a person that uses sign language is Deaf or hearing because hearing people sign more like English language.
- When signing to a hearing person Deaf individuals “Code Switch” or use “Pigeon Talk” to accommodate to hearing individuals version of American Sign Language, which when hearing people use, is more like an English translation.
- Deaf individuals tend to use voice while signing to hearing persons.

III. Health and Wellness

A. General Information

- Tinnitus- a ringing sensation in the ears that is the result of a bodily condition (i.e. a disturbance of the auditory nerve or wax in the ear), it is typically can only be heard by the person affected
- Bilateral Deafness- both ears are affected
- Prelingual Deafness- the onset of deafness was prior to the age of 3
- Postlingual Deafness- the onset of deafness was after the age of 3
- Ménière's Disease- a disorder of the labyrinth of the inner ear that is marked by recurrent attacks of dizziness, tinnitus & hearing loss

B. Challenges to Health Care

- Individuals who are prelingually deafened are less likely to have visited a physician in the last 2 years.
 - This is comparable to the health care utilization of other language minority groups.
- Individuals who are postlingually deafened are more likely to have visited a doctor in the previous 2 years.
- This utilization of health care is similar to people with chronic illness.
- Reported lower overall health status
- Sign Language interpreters are rarely provided in health care settings.
- Poor communication could lead to inadequate diagnosis.

C. Suggestions for Health Care Providers

- Gain an understanding of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which covers people who are deaf, stating that they have the right to equal access to health care
- ADA says that public or private facilities receiving federal moneies have to provide reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities. For people who are Deaf, this can mean providing an interpreter.
- Understand some American Sign Language, at the very least the Alphabet.
- Other useful signs include: help, pain, yes, no, thank you, please.

IV. Resources

A. Technology

- Telecommunications
 - SMS (Short Message Services): Most widely used means of communication within Deaf Community via mobile phones and computers.
 - TTY (Teletypewriter) or TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf)

- Assistive Technology
 - Provides assistance to every-day living situations.
 - vibrating alarm clocks
 - lights on car dashboard for approaching emergency vehicles
 - flashing light baby monitor
 - flashing light door bells
- Educational Technology
 - Provides assistance while individuals who are Deaf are in educational settings.
 - C-Print: Captionist types lecture notes and they are printed off as the teacher speaks.

B. Agencies

- Maine Center on Deafness-
 - A nonprofit community resource center that provides general information and referrals, deaf advocacy, consumer information, outreach services, support services and auxiliary aid information.
 - Website: www.mcdmaine.org
- Baxter Compensation Authority-
 - Program designed to provide financial compensation to individuals who survived abuse while formally attending the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf. Established to assist survivors with the healing process.
 - Website: www.baxtercomp.org/
- Maine Communication Access Program (MECAP)-
 - MECAP provide telecommunication devices to individuals who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or who have a speech, vision, cognitive, or mobility disability. The types of devices that MECAP provides include: TTYs, amplified telephones, speakerphones, and other specialized telephone equipment. Devices are either loaned or sold.
 - Website: www.maine.gov/rehab/dod/agencies.htm

D. Clubs and Organizations

- Bangor Deaf Club-
 - Bangor Deaf Club holds events throughout the year and welcome Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened, hearing, and sign language students to join.
 - Website: http://www.state.me.us/rehab/dod/orgs_deaf.htm
- Association for Late Deafened Adults-Maine (ALDA)-
 - Meetings are based in Rockland as well as virtually online to provide information and support. ALDA-Maine welcomes all hard of hearing, late deaf, deaf, and friends, families, and colleagues are welcome to join.
 - Website: www.alda-maine.mysite.com

- Maine Association of the Deaf (MeAD)-
 - The state chapter of the National Association of the Deaf. This association organizes statewide activities and operates various committees within the state. There is a newsletter that MeAD publishes that is distributed to over 70 members. Membership is not exclusive to individuals that are Deaf.
 - Website: <http://www.nad.org/>

- Maine Deaf Senior Citizens-
 - Meetings held at Millbrook Estates, 300 East Bridge Street, Westbrook, Maine 04092.
 - Website: http://www.state.me.us/rehab/dod/orgs_deaf.htm

- Maine Recreation Association of the Deaf
 - Website: http://www.state.me.us/rehab/dod/orgs_deaf.htm

- Deaf Rights Group-
 - A statewide coalition of organizations and individuals committed to obtaining equal access for the deaf and hard of hearing in Maine.
 - Website: <http://www.mainecenterondeafness.org/drg.htm>

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