The use of social media as a conduit to promote social justice in the Deaf Community, as a cultural and linguistic minority, through the visual language of American Sign Language: A movement against Audism

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The use of social media as a conduit to promote social justice in the Deaf Community, as a cultural and linguistic minority, through the visual language of American Sign Language: A movement against Audism.

by

Sarah Glenn-Smith

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College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
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College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

This dissertation was submitted by Sarah Glenn-Smith, under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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Date of Final Approval

Dustin Berna, Ph.D.
Chair
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Abstract

This research employed a case study approach to understand emerging themes that may be garnered through documenting the lived experiences of online Deaf activists who have used the video feature available through social media outlets, such as YouTube, as a way to overcome the language barrier typically present for linguistic minorities who are leading social movements within an English-speaking, hearing majority. The focus of this study was the members of the Deaf Community that have taken to an online podium in their fight for autonomy and equality. They champion their Deaf identity, their right to agency and autonomy in areas of language, access, education and employment, in what has exploded into the largest social movement in their cultural history. Therefore, two questions were at the center of this research: 1. "How has experiencing audism affected the lives of Deaf people?", and 2. "How has the use of social media as a platform to fight against audism through natural linguistic expression in American Sign Language impacted that experience?". The growth of individual Deaf identity has created a community action network for the Deaf Community, and access to the technology of videophones and instant access to wireless Internet has brought with it the use of video blogs, or vlogs, within the Deaf Community at explosive rates. The movement from disability to a place of diversity and cultural, ethnic and linguistic minority personhood for the Deaf is a path that is still being forged. Presented in this study is a glimpse into this journey, through a case study of their lived experience.
Chapter 1: Research Premise and Statement of the Problem

Research Summary

This research seeks to use case study to understand emerging themes that may be garnered from the lived experiences of online Deaf activists leading social movements who have used the video feature available through social media outlets, such as YouTube, to overcome the language barrier typically present for linguistic minorities within an English-speaking, hearing majority. “Attempts to meet hearing-world standards cause stress, but refusal to do so threatens survival” (Erting, 1985, p. 227).

Problem Statement

The Deaf Community faces challenges born not from their lack of hearing, but from a methodical rejection of their rights as an autonomous, linguistic, and cultural minority. It is this societal discomfort, with a long history of colonization and a lack of understanding of the whole, valid, and unique language used by the Deaf, American Sign Language, that has evolved into a type of oppression and resulting discrimination of the deaf known as audism. The question that this research begins to explore, along with the direct research questions stated below, is “what can and should be done about it?”.

Research Questions

1. How has experiencing audism affected the lives of Deaf people?
2. How has the use of social media as a platform to fight against audism through natural linguistic expression in American Sign Language impacted that experience?
### Table 1: Definition of Key Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TERM</strong></th>
<th><strong>DEFINITION</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(D)eaf</td>
<td>“‘Deaf’ refers to those born Deaf or deafened in early (sometimes late) childhood, for whom the sign languages, communities and cultures of the Deaf collective represents their primary experience and allegiance” (Paddy, 2003, p. xvii).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d)eaf</td>
<td>“The lowercase ‘deaf’ refers to those for whom deafness is primarily an audiological experience...who do not usually wish to have contact with signing Deaf communities, preferring to try and retain their membership of the majority society in which they were socialized” (Paddy, 2003, p. xvii).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audism</td>
<td>“The name for the paternalistic, hearing-centered endeavor that professes to serve deaf people...the corporate institution for dealing with deaf people...the hearing way of dominating, restructuring and, exercising authority over the deaf community” (H. L. Lane, 1992, p. 43).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>“A set of learned behaviors of a group of people who have their own language, values, rules for behavior, and traditions” (Wilcox, 1989).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf Culture</td>
<td>Deaf individuals with a pride in their identity as deaf with a common set of values, including, a deep respect for American Sign Language, division from speech, cultural stories and the importance of communal activities (Padden, 1980).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deafhood</td>
<td>Developed by Ladd (1990), “defines the existential state of Deaf ‘being-in-the-world’...the process by which Deaf individuals come to actualize their Deaf identity...” (Paddy, 2003, p. xviii).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlog</td>
<td>“A short video narrative or story created for and posted on the Internet for public viewing” (King, 2009), as cited in (Khosrow-Pour, 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Purpose of the Study

According to Mosley (2013), “Group consciousness combines basic group identification with an ideology about the groups’ position in society and what should be done to improve it” (p. 228). There is a large faction of deaf people who champion their
Deaf identity and have taken to an online podium to fight for their right to agency and autonomy in areas of language, access, education, and employment, in what has exploded into the largest social movement in their cultural history.

**Theoretical Framework and Application**

Referred to by Cuff (2006) as “emancipatory discourses”, there are three chapters through which a minority must pass to achieve this elusive recognition of whole agency and autonomous identity. In Obasi's (2008) *Seeing the Deaf in Deafness*, these phases are summarized as follows. The first is an *inclusionist* chapter, which is dedicated to confronting, educating, and changing the dominant society’s views in order to allow them group identity membership. The second stage is a *separatist* movement that insulates and defines the identity of the group as membership-driven based on commonality. Finally, the *transgressive* stage, where once identity is defined, an evolution of flexibility is born to allow for fluidity between certain bookended parameters within the group’s identity (p. 456). Guiding this study is a strong belief, based on sound evidence found in the literature and confirmed by the interviews herein, that celebration of, and respect for, the community, language, and identity of those that identify as Deaf enhances the quality of life for the members of the Deaf Community and the world around them. The significance of this belief is born of the same place as all social justice movements fighting for equality; embodied in the work of people like Emma Lazarus and Martin Luther King, freedom is meaningless unless shared by everyone. To borrow an observation from Bauman and Murray (2014, p. 9), perhaps all that is missing between today and a transgression for the Deaf Community is a lack of “imagination”.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Introduction

The future may not be a certainty for any of us, but that fact is compounded exponentially for the member of any oppressed minority (and, as the news in the US so often reminds us, what minority is not oppressed in one way or another?). The focus of this study is the Deaf Community and their fight for autonomy and equality. As R. Harris (2014, p. 409) summarizes in her review of one of the more recent seminal works on the complexity of Deaf Culture, *Introduction to American Deaf Culture* by Holcomb (2012), the Deaf Community is fighting an uphill battle in persisting as an identity that flourishes, while fighting off becoming one that is either a simple amalgamation into the growing number of deaf individuals that are born with multiple disabilities, or one that vanishes all together. The following review walks a path through the literature that documents this journey—past, present, and future.

**Deaf Identity and Culture**

[Are we] “living in a world where people are made up of Deafness or in one where Deafness is made up of people?” (Heuer, 2007, p. 199).

**Identity**

The lens of this study is that of the “Deaf-World,” a concept coined by H. Lane (2005) in reference to “language minorities using signed languages”; in the United States, this language is American Sign Language (ASL) (p. 291). American Sign Language is a form of communication that is wholly independent from English, is visual and special, and is communication through the use of manual signs, body language, and facial expression (Stewart & Akamatsu, 1988; Stokoe, 1980). Agency, autonomy, self-
awareness, self-reflection, identity, selfhood...all provide validity of existence and a place in one’s own world. For any minority group, the access to that validity comes down to “power, powerlessness, identity as a source of power, and the intersection between the three” (Obasi, 2008, p. 456). This intersection is precisely where this work begins. The attachment to identity for the Deaf Community is fundamentally rooted in both language and community culture. The idea that identity is attributed to **language** is not without precedent, for “without language...there would be no self” (Flower & Murphey, 1977, pp. 728-729), and, equally, **culture**, for “it is culture that usually gives people a sense of their identity” (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 58). Language itself is fairly broadly described as a symbolic system through which communication takes place (Agar & Agar, 1996, p. 34). Identity, on the other hand, provides a sense of belonging and the act of carving out one’s place in society (Bernd, 1998). These ideas are completely intertwined in that, when language defines who you are, it creates a place of definition and rises to the status that the culture born of this intersection holds (Agar & Agar, 1996). However, identity constructs are largely imposed and born from interaction with society, and, in the U.S., the language required for that interface is **spoken** English (I. W. Leigh, Marcus, Dobosh, & Allen, 1998, p. 329). I. Leigh (2009) summarizes the concept of identity origin largely debated in the literature as either inherent at birth or evolved by experience.

Irrespective of origin, identity of some form is necessary in order to have a sense of self and is both constructed of, and built upon, a variety of outside factors, such as family dynamics, geography, surroundings, other group identities, religion or ethnic background and membership, socioeconomics, gender and/or sexual orientation (I. Leigh, 2009, p. 2). Collective identity-belonging as a member of a larger, common society-is
developed in relation to how one identifies themselves within a group (I. W. Leigh et al., 1998, p. 2). Naturally, self-reflection assists in collective identity development (Davis, 2014). It is through this process of reflection that those who define themselves using a capital “D” in the articulation of the notion of deaf illustrate that they greatly value their membership in the Deaf collective. “‘Deaf’ refers to those born Deaf or deafened in early (sometimes late) childhood, for whom the sign languages, communities and cultures of the Deaf collective represents their primary experience and allegiance” (Paddy, 2003, p. xvii). This perception is contrasted by the definition of deaf using a lowercase “d”; “the lowercase ‘deaf’ refers to those for whom deafness is primarily an audiological experience…who do not usually wish to have contact with signing Deaf communities, preferring to try and retain their membership of the majority society in which they were socialized” (I. W. Leigh et al., 1998; Paddy, 2003, p. xvii).

Both of these views of the world represent an identity and exist within the physical state of being deaf; however, the cultural association is the identity framework that is currently challenging the societal norms placed upon them. Fundamentally, the societal “norm” is threatening the right to communicate using their natural, visual language— American Sign Language. Society itself is made out of the matter created when ideas are exchanged through the sharing of language (Siegel, 2008, p. 17). Siegel (2008, p. 17) further expands on the inherent nature of community as it is built upon language, self-reflection, and the ability to understand the thoughts of others are contingent upon both the ability to have access to a language for self and for the commonality of information sharing with a group.

If language is the medium, culture is the content. “Culture consists of such
symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices, such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life” (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). Swidler (1986) summarizes the broad reaches of the impact of culture; it is a worldview, a motivation behind strategic individual and group action, and it provides an overlay of context to that action. Swidler’s work is interesting in that she defines “strategy” in this context, not in the more widely used connotation of devising a plan to reach a goal; rather, it is a way in which actions are organized, such as the creation of a network of people that assist in defining self or status (p. 276-277). The growth of individual Deaf identity has created just such a network for the Deaf Community. This process has been affectionately named Deafhood, and is described by Paddy (2003) as one that “defines the existential state of Deaf ‘being-in-the-world’…the process by which Deaf individuals come to actualize their Deaf identity…” (p. xviii). A recent added term to Deafhood is the concept of Deaf gain, a principle that owns deafness as a true benefit, “making the point that there IS gain to being deaf” (I. Leigh et al., 2018, p. 21).

The timing, and possibly the strength, of the process of Deafhood is contingent upon the perspectives of those in one’s environment, as family/peer/society influence has a direct impact on some of the identity “constructs” that develop, and is taken into consideration by an individual when assessing and defining their own identity (I. W. Leigh et al., 1998, p. 2). Further, the perception and identity labels placed upon an individual by others contributes to the shape that identity takes. Therefore, sense of self is first defined and consistently modified within the context of those around us. This presents a unique state for deaf people, who may not be in an environment of those they
share a language and a community with until much later in life. Therefore, the priority and force of Deaf identity in particular has a direct correlation between the individual’s connectedness to the Deaf Community itself (I. W. Leigh et al., 1998, p. 330). “Deaf epistemology”, as defined by Hauser, O'Hearn, McKee, Steider, and Thew (2010), “constitutes the nature and extent of the knowledge that deaf individuals acquire growing up in a society that relies primarily on audition to navigate life” (p. 486).

The type of, and hearing status of, a family that a deaf individual is born into largely impacts their identity (J. Harris, 1995; I. Leigh et al., 2018). The developmental process in deaf children, any children for that matter, is an evolution of what they experience both in their environment and the events they encounter directly. Marschark & Hauser (2011) refers to this process as the “cumulative quality of development” (p. 55). For most deaf children, their parents meet their first deaf person on the day of their birth; according to Paul and Jackson (1993), this often results in a proclivity towards being overprotective and controlling, which can lead to an overuse of physical punishment (in lieu of access to language) if the communication is not well developed between child and parent. This “self-fulfilling prophecy”, a result of a parent’s feelings of inadequacy, powerlessness or frustration, further isolates deaf children from their native family (Marschark & Hauser, 2011, p. 56). Further, the majority of deaf children are unique in that they do not generally acquire language from their parents; therefore, they are dependent upon school mates, interpreters, teachers, work environments and peers to access and learn their language base (Marschark & Hauser, 2011, p. 58).

There is a parallel between the experience of a deaf person in an all-hearing family and a member of the gay community; both recount feelings of being on the outside
of an accepted normal identity (Breivik, 2005). Identity is the cornerstone upon which all sense of self and connection with community is based, as discussed by Breivik (2005) in his book *Deaf Identities in the Making*: “Oppressed and marginalized people are thus engaged in identification process where the stakes are high. To succeed in their identification endeavors, they are often restricted to a limited number of alternatives”; these alternatives are profoundly defined as a “departure from biological roots” and a “search for equals in distant places” (pp. 1-3). There is a deaf experience of developing an identity of *self*, and, by extension, an identity that expands to include a relation to a broader community of which membership is available through similar language and experience.

The hearing community views “proximity”, when it refers to immediate family members, as a place to belong. Deaf people, conversely, accept that distance can be, and often is, acceptable when seeking a place to belong, as those with similar experiences of being deaf are often dispersed throughout the country (Breivik, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, deaf identity is an evolving experience through a life journey of meeting other deaf people outside of the immediate family. The notion of Deaf Community politics is also addressed by Breivik (2005), and he provides a comparison between the Deaf Community’s political stands to the gay and lesbian movement (p. 186). In addition to being a minority group, the gay community has a unique view into the notion of biological familial ties, especially for those that leave their biological family in search for a chosen family (p. 186).

There is a distinction between deaf, hard of hearing, nondeaf, culturally disabled, etc. (Burch, S.K.A., 2010; I. Leigh et al., 2018). Deaf identity has been analyzed through
four cultural alignments using the *Deaf Identity Scale* developed by Glickman (1993) in order to create a paradigm through which these identity affiliations could be understood. The first cultural paradigm is for those that are culturally hearing; in other words, their identity and view of the world is that of a person that can hear and communicates without the use of sign language. The second cultural identity is applied to those that do not fully identify with hearing, nor with Deaf Culture. For example, this describes someone that has grown up hard-of-hearing and has claimed neither identity as his or her own. The third identity refers to those that are fully immersed into Deaf Culture, and value for, or interaction with, the hearing population at large is minimalized. Finally, the fourth cultural identity is a bicultural identity model, in which the person can comfortably navigate in the hearing world while utilizing sign language to communicate and valuing the Deaf Community and Deaf cultural norms.

To this end, Boudreault et al. (2010) summarizes the literature’s consensus of deaf identity differentiation as those who identify with the hearing society by virtue of direct interaction and communication preference. These individuals view deafness through a medical lens, or as an impairment. The second classification is referred to by Boudreault et al. (2010) as those having “marginal identity” or ambivalence toward one culture and language or the other. The third category, and the focus of this work in particular, are those with a Deaf identity who view deafness with a sense of pride, communicate using American Sign Language, and are immersed in the Deaf Community. Lastly, the individuals that can be defined as bicultural are equally comfortable in both Deaf and hearing cultures.
For the Deaf that utilize American Sign Language as their primary communication, culture and language are morphed into one single conceptual identity. This identity is referred to proudly through the use of the cultural label, “Deaf”, the converse of “deaf”, as the membership in a cultural and linguistic minority, and pride in that culture, rather than the medical diagnosis of someone that simply cannot hear and touted by much of the past literature on the subject (Battison, Markowicz, & Woodward, 1975; I. Leigh et al., 2018; Padden & Humphries, 1988; Paddy, 2003; Senghas, 2002; Woodward, 1972). The use of a visual language represents a medium for art, poetry, storytelling, access, and the power of inclusion into a society where they are not in a battle for validity of their capacity and intelligence. In fact, Benjamin Lee Whorf had a term for this melding, *languaculture*: something, as noted by Agar and Agar (1996), that actually changes the very reality paradigm of the different language users. Christopher Jon Heuer illustrates the fusing of Deaf Culture with the very sense of self in an excerpt from his poem, *Bone Bird*:

I said deafness was everything,
   Our blood and our flesh,
The air we breathed and flew in,
   The kill in our talons.
I said that deafness was a song
   To be spread out in a plume,
   Painted across the sky
like a rainbow (Heuer, 2002, p. 32).

In other words, hearing and deaf people physically see the world through different eyes by virtue of their language independence. Yet, power dynamics are in play, much like in any majority, societal ecosystem: “how hearing individuals interact with deaf individuals shapes how deaf individuals acquire knowledge and how they learn”, which
illustrates, more than anything else, a dependent relationship between the two divergent groups (Hauser et al., 2010, p. 486).

Erikson’s 1968 model of identity formation also lends understanding to the conundrum many deaf people are born into (as cited in Cote & Levine, 2002, p. 14). His theory, as described by Cote and Levine (2002, p. 16), progresses across three phases of stable identity development: the first, a strong notion of stable self (also called “ego identity”), second, exposure to the identity stability of those around you, and third, the relationship between self and community. When there is not a strong bond of identity between self and community, a state of identity crisis sets in (Cote & Levine, 2002).

Awareness of self in relation to others in one’s environment [for those that identify as members of the Deaf Community] are generally passed within Deaf families, deaf schools, and social environments within a community that shares the experience of communication and self-expression through sign language (Padden & Humphries, 1988). In a study by Bat-Chava (1993), the self-esteem of young deaf people was shown as contingent upon three factors: a parental positive attitude toward deafness; the access to communication in the home; and a relationship within the Deaf Community, inclusive of feelings of connectedness, language and cultural affirmation (Hauser et al., 2010, p. 489).

However, as I. W. Leigh et al. (1998) point out, questions regarding the development of Deaf identity and culture within a context where it is not always a congenital experience are natural. A study conducted by I. W. Leigh et al. (1998) concluded that the identity development of deaf children born to hearing families was significantly different from deaf children born to deaf families. In part, this is attributed to the pressures experienced by a deaf child to fit into a hearing environment (I. W. Leigh
et al., 1998, p. 336). Those that did not grow up with deaf families, or experience a Deaf identity in childhood, do so later as their interaction within social settings of like outweigh their interactions with their biological families: “The Deaf-World offers many Deaf Americans what they could not find at home: easy communication, a positive identity, a surrogate family” (H. Lane, 2005, p. 292).

While no current nor exact count of deaf individuals exists, Senghas (2002, p.69) uses a ratio of 1:100 provided by Schein (1989), to deduce from the U.S. Census Bureau that there are approximately 6.2 million people who lost their hearing prelingually. Of those millions, 95% are born to parents that are both hearing and do not sign (Marschark & Hauser, 2011, p. 57). In total, Siegel (2008) estimates that 13 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss and 6.5 million have that loss bilaterally, or in both ears (p. 21). Of those numbers, he also estimates that approximately 500,000 individuals use American Sign Language as their primary language. These numbers are estimated even higher by Schein (1989), who approximates the number of the Deaf using ASL at between 500,000 and 1 million, and Binnie (1994), who notes the number of those with hearing loss, post-lingually and without a Deaf Culture affiliation, is as high as 20 million Americans. In spite of the ASL Deaf Community being considered a “cultural enclave or subculture”, scholarly attention paid to signed language is fairly new, beginning in the mid-1950’s (Stokoe, 1980, pp. 368-369).

There are a slew of reasons that aid in understanding why there has historically been a divide between hearing society and the deaf. Stewart and Akamatsu (1988) references some of these factors; first is the lack of access to what the hearing community considers “normal” communication, and the implied lack of value on any that fall outside
of those parameters. The use of sign language, in lieu of spoken English, was once considered on par with an inability to “think”, and therefore, decisions were made, outside the input of deaf people, on their behalf by those in power (p. 239-240). More specifically, “until recently, speech was part of the definition of language as defined by the field of linguistics” (Stewart & Akamatsu, 1988, p. 239).

Again, Deaf Identity may be developed later in life, depending on environment & language access (I. Leigh, 2009). This is not hard to imagine; going as far back as the late nineteenth century, Philosopher Josiah Royce, as also noted in Siegel (2008, p. 17), tied language to the very sense of self (as cited in Flower & Murphey, 1977, pp. 728-729).

However, the examples provided by Baynton and American Council of Learned Societies (1996) of century-long US resistance to American Sign Language highlights why that self is not available without a fight to the Deaf Community.

**Deaf cultural-identity paradigm**

Culture creates the identity of those it encompasses. The notion of *Deaf* as a cultural reference did not make its way into scholarly articles until the 1970’s (Cote & Levine, 2002, p. 16; Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 59; Padden & Humphries, 1988). Culture, for the Deaf, is one of both inclusion and acknowledged exclusion. Culture itself is “a set of learned behaviors of a group of people who have their own language, values, rules for behavior, and traditions” (Wilcox, 1989). Deaf Culture entails its own cultural norms and proscribes (H. Lane, 2005). For the Deaf Community, those defining principles allow the community to separate themselves from the larger group of those with hearing impairments, while being included on the spectrum of minority cultural groups in relation
to more global agendas, such as politics, education, access, and recognition (Padden & Humphries, 2005).

**Deaf culture**

Deaf Culture, defined and described, illustrates the Deaf Community as a cultural and linguistic minority and the importance of their collective identity (Holcomb, 2012; H. L. Lane, Pillard, & Hedberg, 2011). Sign language itself embodies the blending of culture and language for the Deaf. Deaf Culture refers to individuals with a pride in their identity as Deaf and with a common set of values, including a deep respect for American Sign Language, division from speech, cultural stories, and the importance of communal activities (Padden, 1980). Stokoe (1980) denotes sign language as a “human cultural system”, one that is on par with vocal communication for the Deaf Community, and requires a full grammatical system to qualify as such (p. 365).

American Sign Language is inherently entwined with Deaf Identity and Deaf Culture (Paddy, 2003; Senghas, 2002). Stokoe defined ASL as a language (as cited in Washabaugh, 1981, pp. 237-238). The term *sign language*, since the 1980 work of William Stokoe, is reserved for a whole language that is both manual and a complete departure from spoken language, while maintaining par status on planes of meaning, relevance, complexity, nuance, concept, interaction, and emotion (Stokoe, 1980, p. 365). This notion is referred to as American Sign Language being a “veridical language” by Lennard J. Davis (1995, p. 159). “Sign languages are presumed to be doubly structured, syntactically coded, socially acquired and shared linguistic system” (Stokoe, 1980). The Deaf Community is defined as a “linguistic minority” (Breivik, 2005). In short, ASL is
essentially synonymous with the concept of *Deaf Culture* in the United States (Padden & Humphries, 1988; Senghas, 2002).

**Identity as a linguistic minority**

Socialization for Deaf individuals influences their identity (I. Leigh, 2009). Society’s view of “normalcy” impacts identity development as one that is *like* or one that is *other* (Marschark & Hauser, 2011, p. 59). As S. Burch (2000) points out, much has been written to alter the mainstream perspective around seminal identity characteristics such as race, gender, class, etc.; however, the portion of our identity, as it applies to physical ability, is largely lacking (p. 393). Deafness is not considered a disability by those culturally Deaf; rather, being Deaf is a license for membership into an elite “linguistic minority” (Washabaugh, 1981, p. 239). The attachment of the negative connotation to being deaf as synonymous with the word *disabled* rests in the social view of disabled as interchangeable with the word *impaired*, and reliant upon, as Lennard J. Davis (1995); I. Leigh (2009); Obasi, (2008); Senghas (2002), and others point out, a medical diagnosis. A medical diagnosis of any kind generates both social and cultural issues out of the gate (Davis, 1995, p. 82). Deafness as a diagnosis is, inherently, as S. Burch (2000) poignantly notes, a “reduction” of deaf people (p. 393). Paradoxically, in contrast to the reference to the deaf as disabled, there is evidence to that show that deafness, in fact, actually enhances attention and visual periphery (Hauser et al., 2010, p. 486).

**Disabling the Deaf**

The concept of normalcy has created an “ableist” mentality that directly contributes to an oppressive set of standards for the deaf (L. J. Davis, 1995). This is
ironic, considering that the state of being “normal” or “average” did not enter the European languages until the nineteenth century, and was rooted in statics rather than the need to classify the ability of people (L. J. Davis, 1995, p. 3). Pigeonholing a set of the population, such as the deaf, into a restrictive category, such as disabled, is an unnecessary and convenient categorization, echoed by other binary descriptions—“straight/gay, male/female, black/white, rich/poor — is part of an ideology of containment and a politics of power and fear” (L.J. Davis, 2014, pp. 82-83).

If one is on the receiving end of the label “disabled”, it is not appreciated in a positive light. The origin of the label was noted by L. J. Davis (1995, pp. 25-26) as one that dates back as long as print has been available, and its application is defined by the description of “a person with a visible physical impairment (someone with an injured, nonstandard or nonfunctioning body or body part) or with sensory or mental impairment (someone who has trouble hearing, seeing or processing information)” (p. 1). When the term ‘disabled’ is too loosely applied, there is much to be said about the line between where ‘normal’ and ‘disabled’ ends and begins. For example, depending on one’s point of view, people labeled with obesity, addiction, and chronic illness may or may not be considered ‘disabled’. Lennard J. Davis (1995, p. 4) also notes that the Deaf do not accept inclusion into a disabled grouping, but rather, consider their status similar to any linguistic language minority group, for example, those that speak Spanish. He further describes their perspective on their ability as “totally adequate, self-enclosed, and self-defining sub-nationality within the larger structure of the audist state” (p. xiv).

Moreover, disabled is referred to by L. J. Davis (1995) as more of a social construct than a reference to a person’s state of being (p.1). He argues that the way that
disabled is defined has more to do with majority social expectations of ability than the actual disability itself, and is a direct result of attempts of society to “regulate the body” (p. 3). This same regulation is compared by L. J. Davis (1995) as one designed to isolate and restrict components of individuals such as sexuality and gender. As he rightly points out, that fact is that everyone has some otherness in who they are, and the idea of “disabling” people with a label, such as disabled or impaired, creates an immediate chasm between the “normal” and the “less-than”, a concept that the Deaf Community categorically rejects such that a movement has developed in its wake. Examples provided by L. J. Davis (1995, p. 2), such as that one in eight women will develop breast cancer, highlight the fact that the term disabled is one that is not nearly as restrictive or isolated an incident as the connotation implies. The unresolved conflict that L. J. Davis (1995, pp. 3, 7) presents in his work is that, while describing the oppressive nature of society deciding which bodies are and are not “able” enough to be considered what he refers to as “temporarily able-bodied” (the prediction being that all people will eventually have natural impairment(s) of some kind as they age), he himself underscores the validity of the term as one that should be met with fear. His descriptions of able-bodiedness read with an undertone of a threat.

The stakes have never been greater for the development of Deaf identity as a result of their experience (Breivik, 2005). Modes of language among the deaf and hearing populations are the same. Along the entire continuum between deaf and hearing, communication is employed through “written, oral and manual modes…whether it is English or ASL” (Siegel, 2008). Infirmity and cultural models of deaf people have largely been designed through hearing representation (H. L. Lane, 1992). Akin to any
minority population and corresponding identity formation, the notion of labels for the Deaf is both sensitive and vastly important. One does not have to ponder long to conjure similar examples such as Black or African American, Latino or Hispanic, or the appropriate pronoun use for those that identify as transgendered. The World Federation of the Deaf and the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People have jointly rejected use of the term hearing impaired, as it implies that one has a pathological deficit (L. J. Davis, 1995, p. 7; Senghas, 2002).

The traditional way that Deaf studies is taught can be challenged to reinterpret how “normalcy” is defined and understood (Murray, 2008). The Deaf Community has historically fought for agency and autonomy (Greenwald, 2016; I. Leigh et al., 2018). The very ability of a deaf person to have independent thought itself was once the largest question at stake for those born deaf. It is no wonder that their perception is one accurately rooted in disadvantage and exclusion. This philosophical dialogue, as summarized by L. J. Davis (1995), centered around three divergent central arguments: (1) verbal language and thought are inseparable phenomenon; (2) deaf individuals do not have a language; however, thought and language are independent of one another, and the manual language used by the deaf is equivalent to verbal language use and thought; and (3) language may or may not be co-dependent. These points are moot, as deaf people have both.

Sociology of the disabled population impacts Deaf identity & stereotypes (Paddy, 2003). The very marginalization of the Deaf as disabled is referred to by Marschark and Hauser (2011, p. 20) as “destructive” and a barrier to recognition of the Deaf Community as a multicultural minority. Identity has been tied to spoken language, called
“phonocentrism”, a term developed by French philosopher Jacques Derrida, which confines language to only that which is spoken (Dirksen, 2004). Assimilation into the hearing community reflects “identity replacement” and is symbolic of oppression (J. Harris, 1995). The experiences of a deaf person growing up in an all-hearing family are specifically impactful, all too often, not in a positive and affirming sense. Power dynamics exist particularly as it pertains to family language and exclusion. J. Harris (1995) provides a biographical approach to illustrate this experience centered on deaf people in England. This work also highlights the conflict between deaf and hearing people and identifies two key areas where this difference in worldview collides most poignantly: 1) where the “difference of Deafness is most apparent” and, 2) where sign language is “defamed” or “repressed” (p. 177). J. Harris (1995) points out that “The processes of attempted identity replacement [with hearing], symbolic language oppression and oppressive attitude in hearing people combine to render problematic, the formation and maintenance of a Deaf identity” (p. 177).

**Subpar Deaf Education**

Education in deaf schools has been historically subpar and has contributed to the current status of the population (Paddy, 2003). The history of education of the deaf sheds light on the current state of deaf education (Stewart & Akamatsu, 1988). Deaf pupils were the victims of the medical field, encouraging the dominant hearing majority to mold young deaf children into education environments where they were consistently and inherently outsiders. When speech therapy and mainstream environments, lacking appropriate resources, failed to educate the deaf, their population in special education classrooms increased, effectively robbing them of the opportunity to experience
education on par with their intellectual abilities solely as a result of their language difference (H. L. Lane, 1992). It is not hard to imagine how the Deaf Community can feel marginalized when they are outnumbered, quite literally, since birth. The definition of what it means to be “deaf”, either as a medical diagnosis to be corrected or a cultural difference to be celebrated, determines how access is prioritized and defined. However, when most deaf children are born to hearing parents, and most educators, policymakers, and staff in their schools are hearing, and are greater aligned in their view of deafness as something to be corrected to mainstream into hearing society, deaf children and deaf parents are immediately dwarfed in their shadow (Erting, 1985).

Deaf education has changed drastically over the past century; most specifically, the pendulum has swung away from deaf children being predominantly educated in residential, and some might say institutional, schools. In statistics offered by Washabaugh (1981), between the years 1850 and 1950, the attendance in residential deaf schools grew by more than 1,800 percent, from 1,100 to more than 20,000 (p. 17). After the large outbreak of rubella, that number further increased to encompass more than a third of all deaf school-aged children (p. 17). However, by 2012, attendance in separate schools for the deaf had decreased to roughly 12%, with more than 86% of those children attending mainstream classroom environments for a portion of their day (p. 17). In realizing the shift in deaf education context, the questions have migrated from where to educate young deaf minds to how and in what language they should access this education. “Deaf children are not hearing children who cannot hear, but differences should not be equated with deficiencies” (Washabaugh, 1981, p. 238).
In the United States, laws intended to support the diverse needs of deaf students (and other students requiring education environments that diverge from the traditional, mainstream classroom) have stopped short of providing clear direction to these questions. The legal requirement uses the term “least restrictive environment” to guide the how in this equation. However, Marschark and Hauser (2011) refer to this precise language as the “primary source of confusion” in relation to the right way to approach deaf education (p. 19). For example, if a child’s primary language is visual, as in American Sign Language, is it restrictive to place them in a class with all hearing children who do not sign, and provide them access to communication and learning solely through an interpreter? Suppose that one interpreter is not qualified to interpret due to either a lack of fluency or understanding of particular components of the subject matter being taught; is that a condition that is “restrictive”?

School systems do not universally require that sign language interpreters be certified by the national governing body that regulates the quality of interpreters, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (Siegel, 2008, p. 38). Conversely, is it restrictive to place a deaf child in a school of only other deaf children where they have access to their native language socially, but their teacher may be hearing and lacking the linguistic fluency to adequately allow for learning to occur? School-aged children without access to information in their own language will suffer developmentally (Siegel, 2008, p. 30). This fact is horrifyingly illustrated for deaf students in the United States. High school seniors are consistently graduating with reading levels at the 3rd and 4th grade expected level, and 30% are functionally illiterate when they graduate (Siegel, 2008, p. 30). Still, schools in the United States, by an overwhelming majority, place a stronger emphasis on the
acquisition of English than the acquisition of ASL for deaf students (Hauser et al., 2010, p. 488).

While the quality of the education within a residential school for the deaf is dependent on the educator and fluency of the language medium that is used, “evidence suggests that schools and programs specifically designed for deaf children often may be more academically appropriate for them than general education programs…the methods and structure of the regular classroom may not be to their greatest advantage without specific modifications” (Marschark & Hauser, 2011, p. 144). Furthermore, the First Amendment guarantees the right to “freely associate”, and the Fourteenth Amendment mandates “equal protection”. The ramifications of stringent isolation from signed services and peer interaction in deaf schools for deaf students, on the basis of the 1975 legislation Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires that children with disabilities be educated in an accommodating environment within the public education system, while not intentional, is a violation of their First Amendment right (Siegel, 2008, pp. 54-75, 95-104).

The debate continues pedagogically in the field of deaf education; however, a positive outcome of the “least restrictive” language has been a move from predominately vocational-centered education to providing deaf students with, in the best-case scenarios, curriculum that is the same as is offered to their hearing counterparts (Marschark & Hauser, 2011). Marschark and Hauser (2011, pp. 19-20), however, cautions that this search for accountability of education systems for the deaf has also backfired, in that deaf children can be moved out of a public school prior to any accommodations being put in place in defense of a less restrictive environment, for the sole purpose of improving the
average test scores of the remaining students and placing a child already behind in a deaf school, thereby artificially improving scores of one school and deflating the scores of the deaf school.

The tragic state of deaf education is largely due to the lack of access to communication in a native language in the school setting. Siegel (2008, pp. 31-32) summarizes this barrier in the following descriptive list: the inability for staff to fluently communicate with students; lack of support services (note takers, interpreters, etc.); small peer population [in mainstream, non-deaf school, settings]; communication between deaf and hearing students in a designated special education classroom is slim; bureaucracy inhibits the establishment of “language-rich” centers or schools where a critical mass of students of like ages and language needs can be formed to create a peer group; schools generally do not understand or received training on the use of assistive devices, such as FM Systems, captioning, hearing aids, acoustic classroom settings, etc.; there is a lack of language specialists in the field equipped to meet the needs of deaf students; and signed languages are not often formally taught in school. This system for the youngest of the population is in stark contrast to “the clear legal obligations of schools to provide bilingual instruction, qualified bilingual teachers, and a curriculum that recognizes both” (Siegel, 2008, p. 142). The benefits of bilingualism are heralded, especially in place of the deprivation of sign language in its legitimacy and value for deaf children (Bonvillian, Charrow, & Nelson, 1973; Charrow, 1975; Senghas, 2002; Stokoe, 1980, p. 365).

Yet, the vast majority of educators within deaf schools are hearing (Erting, 1985; Moores, 2001). While we have not yet attained full protection, nor proliferation, for bilingualism in deaf education, the US has successfully imparted this right to millions of
non-English speaking students through the 1968 Bilingual Education Act (BEA), later merged into the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Ironically, this protection, which requires public schools “to provide an equal opportunity education for language-minority students”, only applies to non-English speaking students who inherently possess the ability to eventually learn English; whereas, the deaf students who physically cannot utilize spoken English are often excluded (Siegel, 2008, pp. 129-131). What this means is that deaf people must accept the label of “disabled” in order to qualify for their right to attempt to attain equal access to education; “the fact that the disability movement is complicit in the construction of Deaf people as disabled also carries weight in maintaining this label in the legal, political, and social arenas of the wider society” (Obasi, 2008, p. 457).

The success of bilingualism in deaf schools is identified by Munoz-Baell et al. (2008) as encompassing five key promoting factors. These include the acceptance of Deafness as an identity is found in both in society and in political climates, linguistic research on the subject of ASL and biculturalism, and, finally, the evolution in Deaf education and the focus on the deaf in the international community. The fifth factor is most specifically applicable to this study, and is what is referred to by Munoz-Baell et al. (2008) as “growing Deaf activism, self-awareness and empowerment”. “Political identity formation has often involved reconstruction through resistance and challenge,” and this is where the Deaf Community currently resides; in the midst of a resistance (Obasi, 2008, p. 456). Sadly, there are an equal number of inhibiting factors to bilingualism, including: the medical paradigm of deafness, mainstream society’s aversion to the unfamiliar, education
policies around deaf education, the weakness of bilingual education, and the resulting
cyclical underperformance of deaf students (Munoz-Baell et al., 2008, p. 131).

Deaf education in its current state has failed (H. L. Lane, 1992; Obasi, 2008). Proponents of oralism, or, what is considered a verbal approach to deaf education, and advocates using sign language as the medium to the education of deaf children, both site studies that speak to improved mathematic ability and literacy for their respective populations. This is despite the fact that, as also referenced by Hauser et al. (2010), the Commission on Education for the Deaf found that comprehension in speech reading for deaf people is less than 50% (Deaf, 1988). The answer, as spelled out by Marschark and Hauser (2011, p. 18), is that, irrespective of their native language, fluency in a native language is the predictor of acceleration in reading and math. Where deaf children stand to lose is in the time period in which they finally receive access to a language they can call their own, often beyond the critical acquisition period of birth through the age of three by at least two additional years (Marschark & Hauser, 2011, pp. 18-19). However, Obasi (2008) comments that many deaf individuals who chose oralism as adults do so as the result of “education choices that have been made on their behalf” (p. 457).

Education has created a power and privilege (or lack thereof) dynamic for the community, and it is one of the main platforms on which the Deaf communities’ social movement efforts currently stand as something they will no longer stand for (J. Harris, 1995). The experience of deaf people is often rooted in a kind of dependency model from birth; they depend on hearing parents, hearing educators, hearing media, and hearing news anchors, all through a conduit that is auditory or English-based, rather than their
natural visual medium (Erting, 1985). The observation of Siegel (2008) most distressingly underscores both the state and call for action on the topic of deaf education:

There is little doubt that parents in this nation would not tolerate or even understand an educational program in which their hearing children could not communicate with staff or peers. That this is tolerated for deaf and hard of hearing children is inexcusable; thus, the call for a constitutional recognition of the right to communication and language is justified and timely (p.41).

The United Nations, in Articles 3, 13 and 26, allows that linguistic minorities have a right to learn, and gain full command of, their own language and to have their own language and culture taught to them (Siegel, 2008, p. 19).

There is an inherent conflict in Deaf schools: the divergence of culture between deaf students and their hearing educators (Erting, 1985). In a study that examined trends in bilingual education of the deaf, world-wide, Munoz-Baell et al. (2008), concluded that a change on the social and political front, along with the shift from a medical model to a cultural recognition of deafness, would have the greatest impact on the advancement (or impediment) of bilingual education programs. The definition of literacy can, and should be, expanded to incorporate recognition of fluency in signed language (Murray, 2008).

**Audism Explored**

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2003) classifies the inequality of language and the diminished value of minority languages as a fight for rights and recognition. Furthermore, they refer to the imposition of the majority language and the counter-resistance to that push as a “negotiation of identities” (p. 3). Examples of the kinds of resistance, or *negotiation*, in multilingual environments, as expanded on by Pavlenko and Blackledge
(2003), can include public or political debates around issues of education, economics, and policies. However, the largest, albeit blunt and somewhat unimaginative, tool in the tool belt for any majority to resist change at the behest of a minority representation is that of discrediting the opposition (H. L. Lane, 1992, p. 80). This type of diversity within the definition of identity and culture falls along parallel paths with the battle for diversity among race and gender social movements (Obasi, 2008, p. 456).

The deaf have long been represented as “disabled” and that paradigm is firmly rooted in American history (Branson, 2002; Marschark & Hauser, 2011, p. 104; Senghas, 2002). The practice of such rooting is called a conscious “disabling practice” (Branson, 2002; Marschark & Hauser, 2011, p. 104).

As H.L. Lane et al. (2011) state,

The Deaf dilemma is this: To exercise some important rights as members of society at the expense of being mischaracterized by that society and government as a disability group, or to refuse some of those rights in the hope of gradually undermining that misconstruction and gaining rights that are truly appropriate and broader for Deaf ethnicity (p. 47).

In fact, H. Lane (2005) further weights the importance of the Deaf-World as an ethnicity, versus a disability, by stating that this classification is what sets the stage for repression of the community where recognition and autonomy are not only a basic human right, but also a “basic human good” (p. 306).

However, “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95-96). Deafness has been redefined to recognize the cultural association with a “gain”, rather than a deficit. The concept of “Deaf Gain”, coined in a book of the same name by
Bauman and Murray (2014), espouses the state of being Deaf as a benefit, socially, psychologically, and cognitively. In this paradox, “hearing loss” has also been re-defined as a literal loss that hearing people experience by not being privy to the richness of a Deaf experience, culture, and language (Bauman & Murray, 2014). This level of thinking requires a movement from a disabled qualification to a diversity category, much like other minorities, to celebrate the multiplicity of human experience (Bauman & Murray, 2014; Obasi, 2008). Despite a long fight for change, the state of oppression for the Deaf has remained largely the same since the 1960s (Jankowski, 1997). There remains no systematic or enforced legislation requiring that instructors in schools for the deaf have a specific level of linguistic fluency, and yet, the entire education of these youth are in the hands of those who cannot communicate with them.

Audism, a sentiment often compared to the concept of colonialism, is couched in good intentions and wrapped in an “infirmary model”, or the medicalization of Deaf Culture, as explained by H. L. Lane (1992). The values of the Deaf Community are like the values of any other community, including, dignity and autonomy, language, history and legacy, socialization and leadership, all of which, for the deaf, have been stripped away through disabling and audism (H. L. Lane, 1992, p. 27). In the work of H. L. Lane (1992), it is somewhat cynically noted that the human services profession feeds off of the deficiency of the deaf, therefore incentivizing them to further disable an otherwise normal community in order to maintain job security and a perpetual clientele for their help. The term audism itself was coined by Tom Humphries, and is the notion that the hearing majority has exercised the power of their mainstream view of what “normal” means by assigning definition and authority over their agency and decision-making
ability in regard to their education, language, culture and status (H. L. Lane, 1992). Specifically, he defines audism as “the name for the paternalistic, hearing-centered endeavor that professes to serve deaf people…the corporate institution for dealing with deaf people…the hearing way of dominating, restructuring and, exercising authority over the deaf community” (H. L. Lane, 1992, p. 43).

Disabling of the Deaf Community has effectively created a ceiling on the Deaf Community’s access to resources and elevation of status (H. L. Lane, 1992). “Ableism” is a precursor to audist terminology (Robinson, 2007). Robinson (2007), in the essay We are of a different class” Ableist Rhetoric in Deaf America 1880-1920, notes the historical movement, from the late 1800’s to the early 1900’s, of deaf leaders being subjected to “ableism”, and their active resistance to being included in the broader disabled community. While Deaf studies has long celebrated the deaf experience as one of unique cultural and linguistic community, disability studies do not often incorporate specific deaf persons into their discussions (Robinson, 2007, p. 5). “Ableism historically has pervaded deaf elites’ views and representations of deaf culture as well as the ways deaf people have sought to empower their community” (Robinson, 2007, p.5). For nearly two hundred years, activism for the deaf has centered on three key issues in deaf history: “education, employment, and representation” (p. 5). Robinson (2007) expands on the deaf rejection of a “disabled” label that has swung the pendulum to the opposite end of the disabled paradigm and has created an “ableist” mentality within deaf activists. The construction of the community as a cultural minority has “fortified for many deaf elites today a belief in their inherent superiority over disabled people” (p. 18).
The right to an autonomous identity, and therefore to define one’s own identity, “have unanimously risen up the political agenda in all parts of the world”, as illustrated by Obasi (2008), who offers examples such as the political conflicts in Northern Ireland, Kashmir, and Kosovo, among others (p. 455). The crux of these conflicts is reflective of the conflict of audism today, “the right for self-definition and the claim for recognition with a particular identity under debate” (Obasi, 2008, p. 455). Audism is defined by “pathological thinking” and classified with others such as “racism and sexism”, and is discrimination against deaf people (Dirksen, 2004; Humphrey & Alcorn, 1995). The types of oppression present in audism can be outlined in three distinctions: individual, institutional and metaphysical (Dirksen, 2004). Metaphysical audism is the perception that the essence of life and human worth is connection through language, and the deaf that do not use a verbal language are of a lesser status than the communities that do speak to communicate (p. 242). The framework—“language is speech/speech is language”—Dirksen (2004) provides the lens through which institutions are designed to target audism individually at the cultural Deaf Community (p. 242).

**The Right to Language**

A repression of the rights of the Deaf Community to use American Sign Language has contributed heavily to the proliferation of Audism (Paddy, 2003). There is a distinct difference between communication and language. Communication, as defined by Siegel (2008, p. 18), is the process of exchanging information, thoughts and ideas with others and can be so expansive as to include facial expressions and body language, a smile or sideway glance, anything that conveys information, as communication. Language, however, is more rigid in nature; it is a system of structure upon which
communication is built, it is the “systematic means” [of communication] (Siegel, 2008, p. 18). Deaf people, parents and educators emphasize communication, whereas a medical lens of deafness tends to focus on language read and “spoken English” (Ering, 1985, p. 241).

Fishman (1982) argues that “the mother tongue is an aspect of the soul of a people. It is their achievement par excellence. Language is the surest way for individuals to safeguard or recover the authenticity they inherited from their ancestors as well as to hand it on to generations yet unborn” (as cited in H. Lane, 2005, p. 276). It is therefore understandable why the Deaf Community takes issue with the repression of their language in education settings and elsewhere. However, the Deaf are not the first to have their natural language repressed: the Irish people and the oppression of the Gaelic language is one example; yet, they were not labeled disabled in the process (Obasi, 2008, p. 458). Siegel (2008, p. 19) not only espouses that all humans have a right to language, he references Article 5 of the UNs International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, this “declaration also recognizes that the rights of all language communities are equal”.

The Deaf Community has been oppressed historically through the restrictions or pressure against the use of American Sign Language (H. L. Lane, 1992). Thus, this is oppression as an ethical conflict (H. Lane, 2005). The irony, as many, many, others have pointed out, including Bauman and Murray (2014, p. 140), is, almost inversely parallel to the rise in popularity of encouraging hearing babies to sign before they learn to speak, is the deliberate march away from allowing deaf babies to participate in a language that would come naturally to them.
The lack of access at the United Nations for the Deaf provides a case study of systemic oppression for the deaf (Mori, 2010). Siegel (2008) highlights Article 27 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the protection for linguistic minorities offered therein: “this right creates an obligation to protect the identity and to ensure the survival and continuous development of linguistic minorities” (p. 19). In spite of the United Nations active inclusion of a need for access to their proceedings and programs for those from multiple native language backgrounds, and their support of “disability awareness”, they remain largely unavailable for the deaf, as noted in an essay written by (Mori, 2010), Testing the social model of disability the United Nations and language access for deaf people. Since the 2006 adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN has worked to create inclusive practices to promote social justice for those with disabilities. Many countries do not offer sign language services in the most basic sense, but, specifically, even in the United States, where interpreting services are widely available, the UN headquarters in New York City has not provided interpreting services for the deaf (Mori, 2010, p. 236).

While the World Federation of the Deaf maintains a partnership with the UN, when they aim to participate in the proceedings, the deaf individuals are responsible for obtaining the interpreters, unlike participants using one of “six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish” where interpreters are provided (Mori, 2010, p. 236). The UN has attempted to address this concern by providing for the payment of “one interpreter per country” out of the “miscellaneous” budget line; however, the limitation of one interpreter, and the constraints presented by impromptu meetings where an interpreter cannot be arranged on the spot, does not mitigate the
access issue for deaf constituents (Mori, 2010, p. 237). The fact remains that the burden of securing sign language interpreting services at the UN falls largely on the deaf individuals themselves, and, thus, they are largely excluded. “Indeed, broader economic realities intensify the marginal place Deaf people hold vis-à-vis UN programs and events. Due to various factors, including negative social attitudes, inadequate education, limited language access, and employment discrimination, most Deaf people around the world do not enjoy full-time or even part-time employment” (Mori, 2010, p. 238), making access to participation at the UN impossible. The lack of access for the Deaf at the UN “highlights the social model of disability, which teaches us that social factors directly shape the meaning of difference” (Mori, 2010, p. 241). Additionally, the lack of inclusion of sign language into the classification of an “official language” at the UN is an international demonstration of audism, as reflected by a lack of access and a lack of equal treatment for the deaf (p. 241). In short, “the UN functions too much as a “microcosm of the [ableist and audist] world,” treating accommodation and access as burdens” (Mori, 2010, p. 242).

**Social Movement: Deafhood**

Social conflict is a precursor to a social movement. Social conflict, as defined by Coser (1956), is a struggle over resources, status, and, in general, a struggle for a power position (p.8). A social movement is “a distinct social process, consisting of the mechanisms through which actors engaged in collective action: are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; and share a distinct collective identity” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 21). Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) and Social movement analysis are defined in
detail by Della Porta and Diani (2006). While I would not go as far as to classify the Deafhood movement against audism an SMO, in that there is not a single force or organized body at the forefront of the fight, I would not be surprised if the wave of awareness and dissemination of video publicity culminated in a more formal organization in the future. The definition of SMOs, provided by Lofland (1996), seems most fitting of the work effort currently focused on the equal treatment of deaf individuals, “associations of persons making idealistic and moralistic claims about how human personal or group life ought to be organized that…are marginal to or excluded from mainstream society” (p. 138).

I would argue that there is not a group more excluded from society than the Deaf Community. Klandermans (2007) provides a succinct description of the motivation for social movement participation in the terms instrumentality, identity and ideology. The three main draws for resistance through a social movement vehicle is: a desire for change around a set of conditions (instrumentality), solidary among members of a group (identity), and a need to express feelings about both (ideology) (Klandermans, 2007, p. 361). Underscoring the concept of resisting audism as that of a social movement, the Deaf communities’ social movement has centered around three key issues for the last two hundred years: education, employment and representation (Robinson, 2007).

“Social movement” in this context is defined in the work of Jankowski (1997) as the “desire for change among deaf people to the power dynamic and existing social order.” However, there is a trend in the history of social movements toward the rise of a social movement to counter resistance of oppression based on the marginal attempting to access the dominant society (Jankowski, 1997, p. 163). Jankowski (1997, pp. 163-164)
argues that the new form of social movement, specifically in the Deaf Community, but largely applicable to other marginalized communities as well, is toward demanding that the dominant society change and expand to embrace diversity, rather than access being contingent upon tolerance or conformity on the part of the minority group.

“Deaf communities have been swept along with the social model movement largely because they lacked the power to make their own views known” (Paddy, 2003, p. 15). Civil resistance has long been successfully employed to create and inspire change. Specifically, as L.J. Davis (2014) references, from 1990-2006, nonviolent resistance celebrated twice as many successes as its violent counterpart. The Deaf Communities’ nonviolent, long stand against audism, and their use of social media to highlight that stand, is a type of civil resistance campaign. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) describes the nature of nonviolent civil resistance in a parallel to the Deaf community’s current evolution: as there are few “barriers” to participation, especially given the tight-knit nature of the community, “mobilization among local supporters is a more reliable source of power” (p.7).

In the social movement focused on by this study, the visual nature of American Sign Language (ASL) has created a conduit for the use of online video features and the dissemination of social media to create access to “local” supporters, irrespective of geography. “By virtue of their biology, deaf individuals live their lives in a visual reality, which leads to the acquisition of a knowledge base that is different from that of hearing individuals”; this makes a video-based social media outlet a natural platform to host their movement (Hauser et al., 2010, p. 487). The movement is concerned about the need for linguistic and cultural recognition (Jankowski, 1997). “Recognition” and autonomy
should be added to this list, as well as the emergence of “Deafhood” as an identity (Paddy, 2003). “Organized civilian populations have successfully used nonviolent resistance methods to…challenge entrenched power”, which is precisely the point of the work of the Deafhood movement (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p. 6).

Types of resistance within a civil movement include: boycotts, strikes, protests, and organized noncooperation (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p. 6). If Chenoweth and Stephan (2011, p. 10) are correct, and participation and diversity of commitment to the ideals of the movement are the key factors in successfully injecting change into the community, the current movement against Audism is set on a trajectory of success. While the Deaf communities’ struggle for equality parallels all other marginalized groups of people, the uniqueness in their language sets them apart on the very grounds and medium through which they rely to resist marginalization (Jankowski, 1997, p. 163).

Collective action

While the tensions that led to the oppression of deaf rights have been largely explained, this is not enough to translate into collective action without the resources necessary to make collective action possible. These resources are divided into two types by Della Porta and Diani (2006): material (monetary means, employment, access to services, etc.) and nonmaterial resources (power, faith, connection, engagement, etc.). There is inequality in the attainment, generally, of resources in the United States (Edwards, 2007). However, the shortest distance between two points, when aiming to force a group into rezoning the internalization of their oppression, is to create a contingent relationship between the identity the majority chooses and reward (H. L. Lane, 1992). For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act creates many protections for the
rights of deaf people, yet requires the acceptance, or at a minimum tolerance of, the classification of “disabled” in order to obtain their protections.

There is a correlation between resource allocation and the success of a social movement (Edwards, 2007). Five resources are necessary for collective action: moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material resources (Edwards, 2007). In this list of resources, I would add that access to the majority language could be included. While broad access to video technology has improved this access to the signing Deaf Community, it is certainly not on par with what is available to oppressed hearing groups. Resources are too often scarce for the deaf; as Siegel (2008) sadly states, the cyclical nature of the result of the treatment of the deaf has created a “failed language development and failed education soon lead to compromised adult lives…the average income of deaf adults is 40 to 60 percent of that of their hearing counterparts…and 40 percent of deaf adults are unemployed, and 90 percent are underemployed” (p. 31).

Activism within the Deaf Community continues to center around a divergence of “deaf” from “disabled” (Burch & Kafer, 2010). Further, it is argued by Hauser et al. (2010) that it is a divergence of “deaf” from “hearing”: “society is made up primarily of hearing individuals who define how deaf people are to live, express or inhibit their capabilities, and experience their bodies…they must diverge from the hearing ideology” (p. 490). To that end, S. K. A. Burch (2010) considers the overlap between disability studies and deaf studies and the many associated identities in the span between. Specifically, there are many labels associated with relevant identities for those who cannot hear, and these can be included into one or more of the following categories: “deaf, Deaf, culturally deaf, hard of hearing, deaf plus, signer, hearing, nondeaf, disabled,
nondisabled, able-bodied, culturally disabled, ally, and in-between” (xxi). The number of labels themselves highlights the complexity of the topic. “Deaf and Disability Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, as a whole, is concerned with tracing the ways in which concepts of deaf and disability have been constructed through and against each other” (S. K. A. Burch, 2010, p. xxii).

The movement from disability to one of diversity and cultural, ethnic, and linguistic minority for the Deaf is a path that has to some degree already been forged. For example, addiction and homosexuality were once considered “disabilities” (H. Lane, 2005, p. 295). More precisely, H. Lane (2005) offers four distinct sets of evidence for a rejection of the classification of Deaf as disabled: 1) the Deaf do not view themselves as disabled; 2) the slippery slope into medical remedies for deafness create greater physical risks to deaf children, as any surgery would; 3) the potential for the systematic destruction of the Deaf-World, frighteningly reminiscent of Alexander Graham Bell’s eugenics movement, to eliminate deafness; and 4) it encourages solutions, those focused on auditory remedies, rather than language access, that are misaligned with the values of the Deaf-World (pp. 297-305).

The most publicly recognized Deaf-led activism was focused on the board’s hiring of a hearing person as president of the iconic Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, the only deaf college in the country. As summarized by H. L. Lane (1992, pp. 188-191), the 1988 protest, referred to as Deaf President Now, or DPN, drew national attention as a non-signing, hearing woman was chosen over two qualified deaf candidates. The students marched from their campus to the hotel where the board was convening, to the Capital and back to campus. By the next day, all entrances to the
campus were blockaded by students, and they had issued four demands: the appointment of a hearing president be rescinded and replaced with a deaf candidate, the board president resign, the board makeup be restructured to a majority of 51% deaf members, and there not be any reprisal for students that participated in the protest. After 8 days and much deliberation and nationwide media coverage, the students met success on all counts and I. King Jordan was named the seventh president, the first deaf president of Gallaudet University. A formally silent, and often overlooked, minority drew support from an entire nation, sparking Jesse Jackson to send a letter of support and famously saying, “the problem is not that the students do not hear; the problem is that the hearing world does not listen” (H. L. Lane, 1992, p. 190). Padden and Humphries (2005) rightly point out that “Perhaps this is the true lesson of human cultures and languages, that our common human nature is found not in how we are alike, …how we have adapted to our differences in very human ways” (p. 162).

**Visual Language and Technology**

Literacy rates among the deaf are statistically very low, therefore, leaving a dependence on only print media, such as journal articles, news stories, petitions, political advocacy letters, etc., has historically presented a consistent barrier to the deaf having their “voices” heard. In fact, Siegel (2008, p. 30) points out that in the 1990s, only 8% of deaf individuals graduated from college, and that the average deaf child, in the decade between the ages of 8 and 18, only increased their reading skills by a grade level and a half. However, the focus in studies highlighting the insufficiency of deaf student skills is a frame that suggests it is a cognitive capacity issue inherently connected to being deaf. The fact that it takes deaf children up to four years longer to learn to read is far more
likely the result of being both bilingual and their lack of exposure to any language (for deaf children of hearing parents) for the first five years of their lives ((Hoffmeister & Caldwell-Harris, 2014; I. Leigh et al., 2018, p. 143). “The present deaf illiteracy has been acceptable to deaf education…because the low achievement of deaf children corresponds to their teacher’s low opinion of their potential…believing their deaf students to be intellectually handicapped, hearing teachers handicap them” (H. L. Lane, 1992, p. 176).

There may be a difference between a deaf experience through their natural visual language of American Sign Language, and that of a hearing person, but that difference is not one of inferiority (Paddy, 2003, p. 52). Literacy in ASL would aid in English fluency, and yet one is withheld in the instruction of the other. By way of example, a study conducted by Fajardo (2010) found that there is a strong correlation between efficiency of deaf user internet navigation when sign language videos are combined with text to ensure full comprehension via their native language. Further, this same study confirmed that use of sign language on websites would strengthen both socialization and education opportunities for deaf users.

The transition from face-to-face narratives to video distribution of signed stories, traditions, and culture has begun to open up access for the Deaf (Breivik, 2005). Due to the fact that English is most often a second language for the deaf, there are few written deaf autobiographies available in the literature (Breivik, 2005, p. 3). In honoring the tradition of Deaf Cultural expression through the passing from generation-to-generation of narratives, Breivik (2005) follows the life of ten Deaf individuals from Norway to explore their experience and how those experiences led to their identity as a member of a larger Deaf Community. “The absence of a written language has reduced the availability
of deaf stories to the Deaf Community” (p. 3). However, with the proliferation of signed language and an increased use of “signed video books”, the trend is growing for the use of widespread, shared narratives of deaf experience (p. 3). “As with other linguistic minorities who lack a widespread written form of language or access to literacy, deaf people transmit narratives and life stories by means of sharing in face-to-face settings” (p. 3). The use of signed narratives and autobiographies are generally designed to promote the sharing of Deaf Cultural experience with deaf audiences (p. 3).

The first account of deaf use of film was recorded in 1913, and was filmed in reaction to Oralism (Paddy, 2003, p. 53). In fact, the Deaf were among the first to use video technology to disseminate information, and can also be counted among the pioneers to transition from written Internet blogs to video blogs (vlogs) (Bauman & Murray, 2014, p. xxxii). “A vlog is a short video narrative or story created for and posted on the Internet for public viewing (King, 2009),” (as cited in Khosrow-Pour, 2012). The repression of Deaf creativity as a result of oralism is credited for the delay in deaf participation in film making as a medium for expression (Paddy, 2003, p. 53). “Since a video can show a lot more than text, vlogs provide a much more expressive medium for vloggers than text-blogs in which to communicate with the outer world” (Gao, Tian, Huang, & Yang, 2010, p. 6). Video use over the Internet has become synonymous with accessibility for the Deaf. This is especially the case in the context of the distribution of videophones and the provision of video relay services. Video relay allows a deaf individual to call a hearing person by making a video call to an interpreter using video, via cell phone camera, webcam, or computer/tablet; the interpreter then uses their voice to speak the communication conveyed by the deaf person and signs back the response of
the hearing person. “Technology, in particular videophones, texting, FaceTime, Skype, YouTube…has greatly improved access to information and has provided more connections among Deaf people themselves” (I. Leigh et al., 2018, p. 291). As a result, the use of video blogs, or vlogs, within the Deaf Community has grown at explosive rates (I. Leigh, 2009, p. 147; Shoham, 2012).

This ability to connect face-to-face is changing the ways in which people generally, but deaf people specifically, are able to connect (I. Leigh, 2009, p. 149). The internet, especially with the addition of video transmission, has vastly impacted the growth of community connections among the deaf (Murray, 2008). Videos in native language (ASL) improves competency in use of the internet for the deaf (Fajardo, 2010). “Within this face-to-face community, relationships are normative and complex. In this context, Deaf people anchor themselves and develop positive, reciprocal relationships with others” (Erting, 1985, p. 242). The resulting avenues open for the first time to those that are Deaf to exercise normal communication remotely has allowed for technology to create ‘‘universal access,’ meaning that most everyone can use it without stigmatization and with minimal need for adaptation due to individual needs” (I. Leigh, 2009, p. 149).

Social Media

Social media use has skyrocketed in the past decade, and has grown more than ten times, with more than 65% of adults currently boasting site memberships (Perrin, 2015).
This explosion is further compounded by the increased use of video sharing sites such as YouTube. Even as long as five years ago, the Pew Research Center showed a growth of 39% between 2006 and 2011, with 71% of adults using video sharing sites (Moore, 2011).
The digital marketing company Rankyourrabbit.com offers the following statistics about the most popular video-streaming site, YouTube: more than one billion unique visits per month, with six billion hours of video watched each month; 17% of all internet traffic flows through YouTube, one billion of whom are connecting through mobile devices, and it is second only to Google as a search engine (Rankyourrabbit.com, 2016). Between YouTube and Facebook, the access to online video streaming and posting capabilities are almost without measure, but, if the growth in the last three years is any indication, the trend continues, providing a technology ecosystem for those with a visual language to post messages to the world in their own native sign language.

Figure 3. Daily Views of Facebook and YouTube. Note. (Kalogeropoulos, 2016)

Use of the Internet by social movement organizations is “rapidly becoming the norm” (Edwards, 2007, p. 120; Nip, 2004). “Activism on the Internet [is used]…to create solidarity and collective identity” (Nip, 2004; Taylor & Van Dyke, 2007). Online forums are designed to create a sense of social and emotional community support for the member
participants, a relative utopia for the collectivist nature of the Deaf Community (Shoham, 2012, p. 252). Within a given social movement, the online environment, through social media, provides a space for small groups with limited resources to create a dissemination arena, connection, action-planning and collective identity development (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Nip, 2004, p. 203). Gerbaudo (2012) went so far as to credit social media with being “chiefly responsible for the…symbolic construction of public space” for social movement activity (p. 6). The many movements arising from the Arab Spring has brought undeniable attention to the power of “internet activism”, precisely the type of power, more in form than substance, that the Deafhood movement is attempting to elicit (Gerbaudo, 2012).

**The deaf and the internet**

The Deaf Community, prior to the technology of videophones and instant access to wireless internet, relied heavily on in-person networking opportunities, such as Deaf clubs, associations, sports teams, etc. These connections were largely spearheaded by prevailing organizations such as the National Association of the Deaf and the World Federation of the Deaf (Senghas, 2002). The proliferation of the Internet has vastly changed the well from which deaf people draw connections and socialization. In a study designed to observe the behavior of more than two thousand Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in an online forum in Israel, Shoham (2012) found that the most common topics discussed online within blogs of deaf users were “technical aspects” of being deaf-challenges among the hearing mainstream for deaf people, such as education, access, and communication with hearing people. This study confirms the importance of online
forums for the deaf in both social support and interaction and in the exchange of information (p. 261).

Computer mediated communication, or CMC, has a history that is just over 50 years old, and is a term reserved for the way in which humans communicate through the channel of technology (Thurlow, 2012, p. 15). Furthermore, the access to relaying messages via video over the Internet, outside of time and geography, has influenced the actual language production of ASL, as “Signers alter communication practices by limiting sign space, changing how signs are produced…they exploit new possibilities for communicating messages, creating new forms such as the technological transformation of the size of the hand (moving it nearer the camera) for emphasis and clarity” (Keating & Mirus, 2003, p. 712). The rise of the internet and consequent access to visual communication and engagement mediums through video technology has been compared to the game-changing impact of the printing press by Keating and Mirus (2003, p. 693). At least for the Deaf, this is certainly the case. It has created new communicative and participation frameworks, and a stage from which to champion for social justice for the Deaf Community (Keating & Mirus, 2003, p. 693).
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Epistemological views of research methodology exist on a continuum from *positivist*, the scientific method adhering to a hypothesis approach and an interest in cause and effect, to an *interpretivist* view, which “treats the world as socially made” (Mosley, 2013, p. 9). The research in the present study is centrally interested in the ways in which Deaf people are impacted by audism and their use of social media outlets to express their protest against the same in their native language. In other words, “how subjects understand their own actions and circumstances and on how this understanding is conditioned by power and social relations” (Mosley, 2013, p. 9). “The primary uses of the Internet in online advocacy revolve around organizing the movement and carrying out action”, as is the process at the center of this case study analysis within the Deafhood movement, and its corresponding online actors (Vegh, 2013, p. 108).

**Research Focus**

Internet activism is categorized into three types by Vegh (2013): 1) “awareness/advocacy”, 2) “organization/mobilization”, and 3) “action/reaction” (p. 106). These three types, summarized, are such that, “whether one sends out information or receives it, calls for action or is called upon, or initiates an action or reacts to one”, they are using the internet as a catalyst for change (p. 72). The research at hand employed the use of case study to record the experiences of Deaf people using vlogs to promote the three types of activism listed in the advancement of the Deafhood social movement within the Deaf Community and beyond.
Qualitative Research Appropriateness

The use of qualitative analysis methods for research has been prone to much ideological examination regarding its validity, application, and membership in the social sciences school of research. Patton (2002) describes the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods as depth of understanding (qualitative) versus breadth of understanding (quantitative). Qualitative research has been described, in contrast to quantitative research, through the illustration of five key components of qualitative research design by Becker (1986). These components include: 1) a positivist and/or post-positivist approach in the concentration on the social lens of human interaction (positivist), or a mixed method approach that incorporates a quantitative validation of that social observation (post-positivist); 2) an acknowledgement that both qualitative and quantitative approaches are valid lenses to seek answers to research questions; 3) using observation, interviews and interaction, qualitative research seeks to obtain the perspective of the actor themselves directly; 4) the researchers are actors in the social world in which they study; and 5) the interest includes, and is often contingent upon, detailed descriptions of the lived experience, rather than the isolation of particular data points. In short, qualitative methodologies allow for a “thoughtful and critical approach to everyday life” (Janesick, 2003, p. 49).

Methodology

Case Study

Case study research is defined by Gillham (2010) as “a unit of human activity embedded in the real world; which can only be studied or understood in context; which exists in the here and now; that merges in with its context so precise that boundaries are
difficult to draw” (p.1). While a case can range from a single individual to a family to a group, home, or institution, among other contexts, this study is focused on a specific population: Deaf Community members who use social media and video recording technology to post videos online as a social movement against audism.

More than forty years ago, the work of Husserl and Findlay (1970) began to put a stake in the ground as it relates to researcher and participant (Gubrium, 2003). The sheer nature of observation demands that a lens be used through which to look at subjects and, therefore, it cannot be a completely objective endeavor, hence the proliferation of qualitative research. The use of content analysis for research has been prone to much ideological examination regarding its validity, its application, and its membership in the quantitative school of research. The notoriety is owed in part to Lasswell’s criticism of this type of qualitative design in 1949, in which he questions the need for research into, and analysis of, material to be more stringently quantitative. His argument echoes in similar criticisms of qualitative research today, in that even experiential topics, such as communication, can be (and in this view, should be) quantified. While there is a point to be made as to the value of quantifying data derived from discourse, there is also a more fluid opportunity to seek thematic expression via inference and expression of experience that is also a valid application of the tool.

Conceivably, the greatest challenge presented by the case study method, in general terms, irrespective of whether or not one is firmly in the quantitative or qualitative camp, is in how to objectively apply the approach in a consistent and reproducible fashion. The methodology of a study is used to “orient our research work” (Willis, 2007, p. 229). Of interest in this study is the use of case studies to address themes
within the expression of narratives related to the idea of oppression and the social
movement of the culturally Deaf population in the United States. Themes are generally
identified through a systematic coding of language “for the purpose of extracting uniform
and standardized information…coding scheme” (Franzosi, 2004, p. 549). Thus, “the
coding scheme is based on categories designed to capture the dominant themes present in
a text”, or, in this case, video recordings of individuals expressing themes through the use

As is the case with many research methods, the ability of case study to examine
themes and schemes is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. As Franzosi
(2004) notes, it has not yet been shown possible to reproduce the exact subject system of
thematic analysis without significant variability; specifically, “there is no single way of
capturing the meaning of a text (or of all types of texts)” (p. 550). The need for
consistency in types of analysis may just be irrelevant, in that each researcher is
approaching the thematic exploration through a different lens, and that uniqueness of
each study in that regard does not have to be a negative reflection of the methodological
approach in general. Perhaps the greatest appeal to the choice of case study as an
instrument in this study is in rooted in my desire to discover the truths within people’s
experience along the journey, rather than creating a framework and testing to see who
“fits” and who does not. As an outsider respectfully learning from the experiences of the
Deaf Community, I am most comfortable with an approach where “you do not start out
with a priori theoretical notions…— because until you get in there and get hold of your
data, get to understand the context, you won’t know what theories (explanations) work
best or make most sense” (Gillham, 2010, p. 2).
Interview as instrument of case study

I am not necessarily interested in entering the debate as to whether a qualitative or quantitative approach is more scientifically sound, nor whether or not truly objective research is possible from a qualitative stance. What I want is the experience of documenting the worldview of people who have been victims of audism and taken the power of their language into a public forum, stepped into a spotlight, and pushed back. That is the sole rationale for my choice of interview as the mode to conduct the research for this study. In contrast to a “structured interview”, where all questions are completely prefixed and the interviewer attempts to maintain the same demeanor with each interviewee, I will be conducting what Yin (2011) refers to as a more “qualitative interview”, in that I have open, leading questions, but the path of the dialogue with each participant will be social, conversational, and may diverge from the beginning questions dependent on their response to the questions (pp. 130-135). A qualitative interview approach may “dwell on trends and conditions” within the individual experience, which illustrates precisely my interest in this topic of study (Yin, 2011, p. 135).

The use of narratives as a research tool is exchanging "methodolatry in favor of doing what is necessary to capture the lived experience of people in terms of their own meaning-making…their own very particular kind of “truth”” (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003, p. 260). Interviews are used as a tool when the researcher is less interested in the counting of the result and more interested in what is naturally born from the process of expression by the person that has earned their understanding of the world through life; such is my interest in conducting the research herein (Mosley, 2013, p. 10).
The freedom provided in an interview achieves the objective in this case by allowing the respondent to express for themselves their attitudes and ideals around their membership in a group; in this case, their sense of allegiance and solidarity to the Deaf Community (Mosley, 2013, p. 231). They are considered an empirical instrument, and the level of engagement and breadth they offer the research provide the opportunity to uncover thematic occurrences in a population not yet fully explored in preceding research. The first-person expression of experience and personal motivation opens the door for interpretation and the potential for greater understanding of the paradigm, actions, or institutions that contribute to that experience(s). “Interpretive practice…is centered both in how people methodically construct their experiences and their worlds and in the configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality-constituting activity” (Gubrium, 2003, p. 215). Therefore, the benefits of an interview, rather than a survey or other quantitative tool, that allows for the audience of a “lived experience” are many. Mosley (2013) offers several examples, such as “inferential leverage” offered by the respondent to the interviewer, and insight into the metadata of actions and attitudes, hesitations, behavior (i.e. body language and facial expression), the exact context in which the interview took place, etc.

An in-depth interview is especially attractive in Johnson (2012)’s description of it as a “learning process”. As a non-deaf person, I am not engaging with this research to tell the respondents, or the Deaf Community, how they do or should feel about their experience with audism and mechanisms for rejecting that oppression. But, I am interested in documenting their experiences in the hopes that additional attention in an academic domain continues to circulate the importance of their social justice work. The
interviews for this study were conducted via a live video call between myself and the participants at an agreed upon appointment time. Generally, the participants were either at home or their place of employment during the interview. The interviews were recorded utilizing a screen-recording tool, and express permission was gained from each participant for the video recording of the interview prior to beginning (see Appendix A).

**Purposeful Sampling**

Irrespective of whether a study employs a quantitative or qualitative methodological approach, sampling is intended to extend effectiveness and legitimacy to research (Morse, 2009). In order to gain access to the experience of audism, and the exploration of the same by way of social media and Internet activism, a personal account by those Deaf individuals who share those experiences is a must. This population, while not small, is small enough to not be readily available in any one place or organization; therefore, purposeful sampling must be employed to conduct this type of research. The use of purposeful sampling is defined in the work of Patton (2002) as a qualitative method to identify cases where there is not a plethora of a particular population available or accessible. Moreover, Creswell (2011) expands upon the mandates of purposeful sampling by (perhaps somewhat obviously) stating that the sample needs to consist of experts, or those that are involved in the experience being studied. The willingness to participate, and ability to openly articulate a personal experience reflectively, is also necessary for the success of purposeful sampling in furthering a study (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979). Based on this recommendation, I eliminated hogtying and kidnapping any participants.
Sample Participant Criteria

In this research, case study participants consist of adults over the age of thirty who identify as culturally Deaf, use ASL as their primary language, and post self-recorded videos to an online forum, no less than monthly, for the purpose of taking a stand against audism. Participants were identified online and were sent invitations to participate by using the identifying contact information posted with their vlogs on YouTube, their education institution, Facebook, or the contact information made otherwise publicly available. The participant recruitment email text is available for review in Appendix A.

Sample size

A definitive appropriate sample size for a valid study, conducted via an in-depth interview process, has been largely variable and somewhat elusive in the literature. Josselson et al. (2003) suggest that a researcher interview between five and thirty participants in order to achieve saturation (p. 130). Saturation is explained by Miles (1994) as a continuous sampling until there is no longer any new information garnered from the inclusion of additional samples. Johnson (2012) offers examples that range from six one-hour sessions with each of thirty respondents to as few as seven, one-time long interviews, their conclusion being that “the number of interviews needed…depends on the nature of that question and the kind or type of knowledge the interviewer seeks” (pp. 107-108). Best put, the number of respondents is dependent on what is described by Johnson (2012) as “enough”, meaning that enough interviews have been conducted and participants re-interviewed when necessary, so that the researcher feels that they have
learned all there is to learn about their particular question or view they were seeking insight into.

In the case of this study, seven internet activists were interviewed. A level of saturation was obtained after interviews with seven Deaf people. The resulting themes and experiences within the interviews began to echo each other, in a repetitive fashion, such that their representation of other like-minded participants was highly probable. Though a relatively small sample size, the participant’s narrative also agreed with what was found in the literature as it relates to the prevalence of, and challenges inherent to, audism. Any additional nuances between them were idiosyncratic, rather than differing perspectives on deafness, culture, audism, or social justice movements in the Deaf Community.

Interviews entail a much smaller sample population than surveys (Mosley, 2013, p. 6). In several studies that parallel this one, in relation to work around group identity and consciousness, most specifically in reference to African American racial groups, interviews were used as a basis to study group membership, identity, and awareness (Mosley, 2013, p. 229). I draw attention to this particular body of work as a result of its likeness to studies of Deaf identity. There are enough ambiguities around the potentially resulting product of research for this population that, as Mosley (2013) notes, the open-ended and in-depth nature of the interview process is the more effective methodological tool in the pursuit of a window into the experience.

**Interview Question Development**

The same “leading” interview questions were used for all participants. In the development of the leading questions themselves, the questions were first asked in
American Sign Language of a non-participating, Deaf volunteer who uses ASL as their primary language, in order to confirm that the questions were clearly understandable to a Deaf audience. There is a hole in the research related to the impact of working with interpreters (Mosley, p. 145). As such, I chose to utilize myself as a direct interviewer in conducting the interviews. As defined by Janesick (2003), “qualitative research design is an act of interpretation from beginning to end,” therefore, the approach in this study, both physically and metaphorically, embodies this element of the research at hand.

**Data collection procedure: interview questions**

In conducting this type of qualitative interview, the essence of a unique and personal account must be captured. In order to do so, Yin (2011) offers three inherent requirements to the interview itself. First, the interview questions are a guideline for the researcher, but can, and likely will, be diverted from by each participant. Second, a conversational approach elicits trust and necessitates a fluidity to follow the lead, to some degree, of the participant responses in order to truly allow for honest expression. Third, questions should be largely open-ended, rather than eliciting single-word responses; the goal is to gain access into their personal account, therefore, assuming clairvoyance is not a tool in the researcher’s repertoire, and the interview must allow for the participant to respond in their own words. All three of the above criteria were considered in the development of the research questions in Table 2.1.
**Table 2**

*Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Interview Leading Questions</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographics &amp; Context</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you a member of any other minority group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are your parents Deaf or Hearing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do they sign?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you communicate with your family growing up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you communicate with them now? How often?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you learn sign language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you go to a deaf school, or a mainstream school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you went to a deaf school, were your teachers mostly deaf or hearing? What was their fluency in ASL?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you went to a hearing school, how did you access the information, through an interpreter?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you used an interpreter, what was their fluency?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Perspectives on Audism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you describe your identity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel about the term “disabled”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does the word “normal” mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has audism affected your life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there one particular experience with audism that stands out for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What factors have contributed to the oppression of Deaf people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to a Social Justice Movement through Social Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has social media changed the way that you combat oppression?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you create vlogs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main purpose for your posts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are you targeting, the Deaf Community in a “call to action”, or the hearing community in an educating framework?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your objectives/What do you hope to accomplish by being active online?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the ability to video recording, rather than written blogs, change the way that you express yourself as a Deaf person?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If video were not an option, would you be active in a written blog environment? How would you feel about that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you could change the world for Deaf people in one way, what would you wish for?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the identification of organic emerging themes within the interviewee responses, the overarching agenda of each of the seven participants will be categorized into one or more of Vegh’s (2013) Internet activism classifications: 1) “awareness/advocacy”, 2) “organization/mobilization”, and/or 3) “action/reaction” (p. 106).

Participant Recruitment Process

Participant Tracking

Potential participants were identified utilizing social media public forums, YouTube and Facebook, as well as recruitment emails sent to university graduate school programs with a high concentration of deaf students-Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf-and deaf residential school faculty. Table 2.2 illustrates how responses were coded and tracked prior to interview confirmation.
Table 3

Participant Recruitment Tracking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order contacted</th>
<th>Nomenclature for Confidentiality</th>
<th>Dates Contacted</th>
<th>Recruitment Email text sent</th>
<th>Consent Form sent</th>
<th>Interview Questions sent</th>
<th>Consent form received</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4/18/2017 &amp; 5/2/17, 5/10/17, 5/16/17</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5/18/2017 10:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5/18/2017 11:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4/11/2017 &amp; 5/2/17</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5/16/2017 4 PM</td>
</tr>
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<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
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</table>

Participant Anonymity and Data Safeguards

Principal Investigator Qualifications

While I philosophically value kindness above all other character traits, I also recognize that kindness is subjective, and often times, the driver for kindness is more emotional decision than action. In addition to taking me at my word on my appreciation
for being kind and generally believing in doing the right thing, I submit the following as a summary of my qualifications for serving as a researcher: I earned a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology, where understanding how to appreciate individual needs, motivations, and perspective was the cornerstone of my study around the human experience. I have an executive MBA degree that included a 4 semester, 2-year course titled Emotional Intelligence; I specifically studied communication and interpersonal skills for demonstrating empathy by speaking to people in a fashion that accommodates their individual needs. I also have a Master’s Degree in Conflict Analysis and Resolution (Nova Southeastern University). I have completed all coursework for the Doctoral Program in Conflict Analysis and Resolution, including all required Qualitative and Quantitative coursework designated by Nova Southeastern to qualify a student to be a researcher. I have completed the CITI training twice. I am currently ABD at Nova Southeastern University.

In addition to my academic endeavors, I have taught several workshops and classes in community education programs on the topic of ethics in working with the Deaf Community, my population of study for this research. I attended 4 years of American Sign Language and Interpreter education at Riverside Community College, worked formally in a Deaf advocacy agency for 5 years in California (at the Greater Los Angeles Council on Deafness), served as the Executive Director for a nonprofit agency serving the deaf in Buffalo, New York for 6 years, and I have been a nationally certified sign language interpreter (dually certified in interpretation (CI) and transliteration (CT)) from the sole accrediting body, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (visit www.rid.org for a detailed description of RID and the certification criteria), since 2003.
I have run companies, and worked with hundreds of employees for the past 15 years. I have worked as a Chief Executive Officer for a midsized healthcare organization. I am well versed in the ethics of “do no harm”, and have been solely responsible for my companies’ compliance to protected health information regulations and HIPAA (The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996), the United States law that protects the health information of its population. I am currently serving as a president for the largest healthcare system in Western New York, and oversee several research studies of human subjects through clinical trials, governed by the internal review board of each of the respective sponsor universities, in the area of oncology treatment.

**Data Storage & Anonymity Preservation**

The recorded interview files, consent forms, and any associated documents will be preserved so as to avoid any correlation between the documents and data and the direct participant. No names were used; rather, numbers 1-7 identified participants. The videos of the recorded interviews were analyzed by myself, as the primary investigator, following each interview. The videos and notes were saved in a password protected Google Drive folder. A Deaf professional, fluent in ASL, was used to verify the cultural and linguistic integrity of the analysis. However, the cultural and language subject matter expert used to review each video and corresponding text between the recorded ASL interview and my written English analysis, did so in my presence, on my computer, so that the protected files never left a secure location, nor were they sent anywhere. The recorded interview will then be deleted after the required 3-year recordkeeping window has expired, so that the person cannot be linked to the interview, or video, in any way. Figures 1.4 and 1.5 illustrate the security and process as described.
The Belmont Report Research (1979), provided by the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services, outlines the “ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research”. Published on April 18, 1979 for the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, these principals are described below, and were strictly adhered to during the research process of this study. There are three tenants of the Belmont Report: 1) respect for persons, 2) beneficence, and 3) justice. Respect for persons involved in a study mandates that individuals are “treated as autonomous agents”, and those that are not
autonomous, due to some diminished capacity, are protected as a basic component of the research.

The Deaf participants in this study were not diminished in any way; they do not communicate using speech, and the evidence for the cultural identity of their state being a gain, rather than a deficit position, is clearly defended throughout chapter two. Respect for autonomy requires that the participants’ perspectives be incorporated without manipulation. The voluntary participation on the part of the interviewees, as well as the open-ended, qualitative interview approach, was chosen for this research to accomplish precisely this objective. The need for “beneficence”, reflective of the Hippocratic oath, further expands on the respect for persons by ensuring that first, no harm is done to the participants as a result of their participation, and second, that benefits are maximized while harm is minimized. As this study incorporated a voluntary conversational interview focused on a personal account of experiences that the participants discuss purposefully on public forums, the potential for harm was not present in the study. Rather, this particular research process was a parallel to what they are doing regardless of the study. Finally, “justice” is in reference to the potential for an unequal distribution of benefits to one group over another, or, more specifically, the likelihood for the participants in a research study to be treated in a way that is unequal to any other group as a result of the study. The entire premise of the study is that the participants are, or have in the past, experienced unequal treatment as a component of their lived experience, and is asking them to recount that experience through several lenses that are unique to them and their personal experience. Therefore, there is no potential for an unequal distribution of benefits as a result of the study. If anything, this research seeks to understand why unequal treatment
of Deaf persons remains present in society, and what tools are being used to combat that presence.

I am particularly sensitive to ethical considerations as a non-deaf interviewer interviewing Deaf people. “Power shapes the process of interview research from beginning to end, from the initial formulation of the research question to the final dissemination of the results” (Mosley, p. 67). While power dynamics between minority and majority groups is not something one person, or one researcher, can take responsibility for, it is imperative to employ “reflexivity” in paying homage to that dynamic throughout the research process in order to maintain an ethical relationship with respondents in the research (Mosley, pp. 82-83).

**Researcher Position: why me, why them?**

A researcher conducting a qualitative study is not merely an objective instrument, as Yin (2011) calls to our attention in the literature. Rather, the researcher, along the entire journey, from choice of topic, sample identification, and interview questions, to their articulation and interpretation of the evidence, and their view of the results of the study, *is* “the primary research instrument” (p. 69). This requires disclosure of such personal perspectives in what Yin (2011) refers to as “stock-taking and self-examination” (p. 69). Further, Yin (2011) expands this thinking by stating that, “although the original events being measured may be external, what you report and how you report them are filtered through your own thinking and the meaning you impute into your data collection…the data cannot be completely external” (p. 130).

As a young teenager, I was the free-thinking, driven, frustrated daughter of a Christian evangelical minister, subject to all of the expectations and rituals this carried
with it; the very picture of timeless teenage woe. The first deaf person I met was in the
front row of my father’s church. He was Deaf, black, passionate, and gay. I had struggled
with being a lesbian in an environment that embodied all that was traditionally Christian,
wholesome family, school, and church, which damned the whole gay lot to eternal
damnation for almost as long as I can remember. The introduction to this Deaf man, and
his group of Deaf friends, who lived and worshipped, unabashed, in full expression of
any identity they pleased, truly “deaf” to the objections around them, was a breath of
fresh air. The more I knew them, the more I wanted to communicate without restriction. I
took my first sign language class at the local community college while I was still a senior
in high school. I was both afraid and completely enamored the entire semester. When I
graduated high school, I entered a five-year, intense interpreting training program. I took
every class at my disposal, showed up to every Deaf Community gathering I could find,
and surrounded myself almost exclusively with members of the Deaf Community. What I
found in their world was acceptance, friendship and a welcome openness that can only be
described as being “alive” as myself for the first time. The identity and pride they owned
was powerful, and the ability to communicate superseded prejudice, racism, age, religion,
and most other barriers that are typically exclusionary in the general population. I began
working for the local Deaf agency, whose services included providing advocacy for
access, interpreting services, job placement and training for the deaf. I became a
nationally certified sign language interpreter and worked in the field for over a decade. In
this community, I have met some of my best friends, my wife, who is Deaf, and adopted
our oldest daughter, who is also Deaf.
Whether in my hometown in California, my current home in New York, or visiting other parts of the world as far away as Thailand, every Deaf person I have encountered and communicated with fashions a sense of instant community. I have felt intensely grateful for the gifts these relationships have brought to me personally, and am both humbled and inspired by the boldness in which they live and love their language, culture, identities, and community. While I no longer work professionally with the deaf, often, over the years, my respect for the Deaf has elicited a stark defensiveness in the face of oppression, misunderstanding, and patronizing, demeaning treatment. I have watched as some of the barriers for the deaf became dismantled by the advent and proliferation of video technology and the access that the Internet provided. Yet, as an outside allied observer, I continue to witness the Deaf Community’s fight for respect, education, employment, language, and autonomy. As a parent of a Deaf child, I have fought against the abysmal education options for deaf students. As the wife of a Deaf person, I battle regularly for the recognition, respect, and equal treatment my wife deserves when obtaining healthcare or navigating her professional landscape. When considering a conflict resolution-related topic that would hold my focus and embody my passion, studying the fight for social justice at the center of the Deaf experience was a natural selection; in fact, for me, it was the only acceptable option.

Data Analysis

Video narrative review

Close attention to all aspects of the participant’s responses is necessary to capture the personal experience that an interview offers. “Qualitative interviewing requires intense listening…and a systematic effort to really hear and understand what people tell
you” (Rubin, 1995, p. 17). In depth “listening” poses an ironic and interesting challenge when interviewing a participant in not only my second language, but also one that is visually, rather than auditorily, received. Careful attention was paid to ensure the integrity of the speaker’s narrative. Each video was watched and analyzed by myself as a fluent user of American Sign Language. The videos were re-played multiple times to ensure not only accuracy, but also the nuance, sentiment, expressions, body language and readiness, versus hesitation, to answer each question promptly were captured. This second phase of iterative review allowed for fine-tuning of the examination of the interview content, but also, more importantly, of my understanding of the interview subject. The analysis of each, written in English, along with the videoed interviews, were then shown to a Deaf, native ASL linguistic assistant, fluent in English, to confirm that the intent, nuance, and content of the speaker’s message was accurately represented in the identified themes and commentary.

**Coding**

As earlier stated, Vegh (2013) cataloged Internet activism into three forms: 1) “awareness/advocacy”, 2) “organization/mobilization”, and 3) “action/reaction” (p. 106). The objectives projected through the narrative responses of each interviewee were coded according to those aimed at platforms for advocacy, calls for mobilization, or an intent to garner a reaction from their respective audiences. Additional overarching themes were also identified across the interviews, and, where they were visible, a correlation between the hearing status of their family of origin, whether or not they were born deaf, and education setting (mainstream or deaf school) were identified and noted. A description of the emerging themes is described at length in Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

I was unsure what to expect when I first began my research, and yet, with every interview, I ended the call with a renewed passion and a comforting knowledge that I had chosen both my topic and my population exactly as it was meant to be. Within the Deaf Community, I have found an identity, a home, an education, and something worth fighting for, be it by direct participation as an ally in social justice movements, or by print in research and honest conversation.

Participants

In total, seven people were interviewed. The range of participant backgrounds included ages ranging from 30 to 55, both gay and straight, black, and white, and with education experience ranging from an associate’s degree to a Ph.D. The breakdown of each participant can be found in Table 2.3 below.
The interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format by way of video call using the Apple FaceTime feature via computer. Screen recording of the interviews was accomplished using the screen record feature within the Quick Time Player application. The interview questions were used as leading questions, while the responses were allowed to be largely freeform for the comfort level and preference of the participant. Nine overarching topics were addressed, dividing the responses into three global categories: 1. Context: Participant Background and Identity, 2. Experiences with Audism, and 3. Social Justice and Use of Social Media. Using the framework identified by Vegh (2013), the participant use of vlogs were identified by one or more of the three forms of Internet Activism: 1) “awareness/advocacy”, 2) “organization/mobilization”, and 3)
“action/reaction” (p. 106). Finally, each participant was asked to answer the question, “if you could change one single thing for the Deaf Community, what would it be?” as a way to ask them to crystalize their objectives for their community into one priority issue. The emerging themes are discussed in Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion. Consistent with a conversational-style interview, with each participant the questions were asked a bit differently. However, the differences were in nuance and semantics, rather than content, and each topic opens with the type(s) of question asked of each. For example, for the topic of “identity”, the question may have been posed with one participant, “how do you describe your identity?”, and with another, when the participant requested clarification on what was meant by the question, the question was rephrased to “how do you define yourself as a person?”.

**Interview Summary By Topic - Context: Participant Background and Identity**

**Family**

**Question Type(s):** Are your parents Deaf or Hearing? Do they sign? How did you learn sign language? How did you communicate with your family growing up? How do you communicate with them now? How often?

**Participant 1.** She refers to her parents as fluent “enough” in sign to communicate, and says that they served as her “ears” in extended family gatherings. She said she coped with a lack of communication among the larger family by setting herself to tasks that avoided conversations, such as cooking or washing dishes during those events. However, she brightens immediately when talking about her hearing son, his fluency in sign, and his natural tendency to ensure she is included in all communication; serving happily as her interpreter. His interpreting, and the closeness of their relationship,
seemed to have created a bridge for her to interact with the rest of the family. She went as far as to say, after her son had created a communication venue for her and the family, they would tell her they missed her when she was out of town or not able to attend family events. Her son’s interpreting created a relationship between she and her family that would have never been present otherwise.

**Participant 2.** Her lips pursed when stating that both parents were hearing. She mentioned one aunt in her extended family that was deaf. A deaf family member, even outside of the nuclear family, seems to provide a noteworthy tether to roots within the Deaf Community. While her parents minimally sign an elementary level of communication, she rolls her eyes and “loudly” shrugs when describing their inability to understand her sign in return, so she verbalizes in order for them to understand her. She credits the fact that her father’s sign production is clearer than her mother’s to the fact that her father had exposure to a few deaf employees at work.

**Participant 3.** His immediate family, both parents and one sibling, are Deaf, and use solely ASL to communicate. The extended family are all hearing, and do not sign. His father, who was educated in an oral school, would minimally lip read, or they would write briefly to communicate with the family at large. They would sometimes work as a team, attempting to understand what was said, with each deaf family member catching a different component of the topic being discussed, and then “team interpreting” the message to the others in order to put the different pieces in context together for collective comprehension. Predominantly, during family gatherings or holidays, the deaf family would sit at one end of the table together, while the rest of the family sat at the other, each communicating separately in their own language. His parents were involved in the
community at large, and he grew up going to the Deaf club where his identity was one of a community member within the Deaf Community.

**Participant 4.** She started school in an oral environment, and her parents were both frustrated with communication and did not know where to place her. She and her mother began to attend a sign language class together when she was six years old. Today, her father only knows how to fingerspell words, and her mother signs very slowly, without full fluency in the language. In order to communicate they use some sign, and she uses someone else to interpret. Alternatively, they make do with a mix of oral and manual communication to communicate rudimentary concepts to each other.

**Participant 5.** Both of his parents are hearing and do not sign; when asked how they communicate with him, he laughed and shrugged before responding, “they don’t”. He was not born deaf, so had English as a base language for his first five years, before suddenly losing his hearing due to an illness. The communication he had with his family was solely by way of lip reading and speech until he was twenty-one years old. Shortly after, his parents both passed away, and he has not had much contact with the remainder of his family since that time.

**Participant 6.** In spite of the fact that she has many siblings, only one of her sisters has any ability to communicate with her using sign language, and even that communication was not until they were both young adults. As none of her extended family uses sign language, holidays were a time when she was left out of the chatter at the family table and during gatherings. As a young child, she describes the experience as a bit easier, as children tend to play actively, rather than have deep conversations. However, the older she got, the more she would attempt to participate in family dinner
dialogue. Her question of “What did they say?” was met with two answers deaf people are all too familiar with: “It’s not important.” and “I’ll tell you later.”. After a while, she stopped asking. As a young adult, she brought a boyfriend to accompany her to family events, which provided a person to connect with, and reduced the feelings of isolation.

She traveled occasionally to visit other family, and noted that those of Italian decent, who tended to be more demonstrative, or “talk with their hands”, made her feel more included. She reflects on joining activities with cousins of the same age, such as swimming and roller-skating, but always being left out of the conversations. She said they never got to really know each other as a result, and that they did not know even the most basic things about her, such as her favorite color. In fact, it was not until her participation in Facebook postings that she feels members of her family gained insight into her opinions and preferences, and the comments online that this has elicited has opened some additional relationship she would not have otherwise had. Interestingly, she provided one example related to family conflict that Facebook brought to light that she had previously not experienced as the one member of the family that was cut off from communication. Politics are hotly debated across social media, and she has an active feed related to her political views. These views incited some of her family members to debate with her online, and, more than the political views themselves, the conflict management dynamic within a familial relationship was one she had never had the opportunity to observe or develop a comfort with. She says this with what presents as a great sense of ease, and has settled on a “choose your battles” approach.

**Participant 7.** Growing up, her family did not learn to sign to communicate with her, and to this day they struggle to understand or accept Deaf Culture. She comments
that, after working hard to become a successful and educated adult, she is disappointed in the lack of progress her family has made in appreciating her identity as a Deaf person. She has even experienced this in the reverse; some family members see her education as a “threat”. In her words, she comments that their perspective is that “even a deaf person is smarter than us, and now is posturing to show it”. She is the only person in her family with a degree. She feels a strong sense of the differences in their life experience and hers, and, without equal footing linguistically between them, making connections between her and her family is arduous at best.

Identity of self

**Question Type(s): How do you describe your identity?**

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 immediately responds to this question with heightened posture, a wide smile, and the words, “happy to be Deaf!”. She said that this content she feels with her identity was a journey that began to take shape as a middle school student, where she felt she could not relate to a common experience with her peers. She said she was made fun of by deaf children with Deaf parents and oral deaf students, as well as hearing students. She feels that she did not find her “community” until she took her mother’s advice to see herself as a powerful piece of the world around her, in which it was her decision who to surround herself with. She took this counsel to heart, and, through purposeful selection of whom she associated with, was able to develop a strong and healthy community network. She said that membership in a community at large started with her accepting and loving herself as a Deaf person first and foremost, and the rest felt somewhat magnetic in terms of who she drew into her circle.
**Participant 2.** She describes herself first as Deaf with a capital “D”, and takes pride in the culture and language that is inherent to this identity. She describes herself as a strong advocate, and as one that not only takes issue with discrimination and oppression, but also as someone that is ready to stand up and fight against such things. She does so with great confidence and a matter-of-fact tone, demonstrated by a resolute pursing of her lips and a curt head nod.

**Participant 3.** He describes himself as a person who is proudly, culturally, “Deaf”. His experience as a Gallaudet graduate, and strong cultural alliance to the Deaf Community, play a large part of how he defines himself, but he emphasizes that he is an individual.

**Participant 4.** She describes her identity as a Deaf, lesbian woman.

**Participant 5.** The identity he uses to describe himself is simply, “Deaf.” He does not seem particularly passionate about the subject of identity, but does indicate that he did not establish a connection to the Deaf Community until his first year of college.

**Participant 6.** She characterizes herself today as a “big ‘D’ Deaf person”. However, she had a positive experience in an oral setting at a small, mainstream school, and struggled to accept her identity as a Deaf person, preferring to be as much like the hearing students as possible when she was younger. She first learned some signed vocabulary from the less-than-qualified hearing interpreters that were working with her in school. She did not begin to develop her identity as a culturally Deaf individual until she became a student at a deaf college, and enrolled in sign language classes as a way to better communicate with, and relate to, her deaf peers. This was her first exposure to successful, educated deaf people like herself. Shortly after arrival, she broke up with her
hearing boyfriend, and jumped in with both feet in a place she finally felt a sense of commonality and belonging.

Participant 7. She did not fully realize what it meant to be “Deaf” until starting college at Gallaudet University. She also lacked a full understanding of, and appreciation for, her identity as a black woman. Without access to full communication, as a young person she did not have answers to questions about black community cultural norms and history, and it was not until she was a college student that she recognized the shame she had felt about her identity. She now defines herself strongly, shoulders back, with a set gaze, as a black, Deaf woman, and both dominant components to her identity she describes as carrying with equal weight.

Perspective on “disabled”

Question Type(s): How do you feel about the term “disabled”? 

Participant 1. The word handicapped is offensive, but “disabled” is, in her opinion, hesitantly accepted, purely because it allows for access to legal protections and rights. However, she feels there should be access to the same rights to accommodations for those in the category of deaf as a distinct classification, separate from disabled. She emphasizes that deaf people are not “disabled”, they simply cannot hear. To explain the difference nomenclature can make, she references one deaf school that has changed the term “special needs” to a department for “academic learning skills”, which emphasizes the positive and possibility without a negative connotation.

Participant 2. She does not appreciate, nor accept, the term “disabled” if it is applied to her. She states that she is qualified and able to do anything except hear. Her
approach, when referred to as “disabled”, is to respectfully educate the person, explaining the paradigm of equivalent competencies, and that the term itself is seen as offensive.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3’s reaction to the label depends on the audience that he is speaking to, as well as the context. In general terms, he does not consider himself disabled, and will quickly correct anyone that uses that label in his direction. However, there are certain situations where defining deaf as “disabled” is a natural path to accessing needed resources, such as a sign language interpreter or a note taker when in class, and, in these cases, he does use and accept the term as valid and appropriate.

**Participant 4.** For this participant, the question around a “disabled” categorization was met with what I would describe as an unconcerned shrug. The term “disabled” does not bother her; the word is germane to receiving access to needed services, such as, interpreters, captioned television and video relay and nothing more.

**Participant 5.** The answer to this question for Participant 5 reflects two opposite sides of the same coin. He feels fortunate to work in an environment that is, for the majority, set up to accommodate deaf people, as it is a deaf university program. He reflects that the Deaf Community has a long-standing conflict with the weight of the negative connotation with the word “disabled”, and the services the word provides for. For example, being deaf in a hearing world creates barriers to obtaining gainful employment, and, therefore, the social security income many deaf people rely on to survive is received through the government labeling of deaf individuals as disabled. The same is true for financial support for tuition at universities or eligibility for scholarship qualifications.
He is light and smiling as he notes the inherent opposition in the argument of both extremes; deaf people receive access and services because they are disabled, while, at the same time, collectively saying that they are not “disabled,” the world is merely “signing impaired”. He does not know how to resolve such a conflict, but certainly acknowledges that it exists and is problematic. As an individual, he does not typically publicly call himself disabled. However, as a professor and mentor of Deaf college students, the wrestle with the word and its application endures among his students. For example, he was applying for grant funding for a student program, and the application for students had a demographic section, part of which required the applicant to mark disabled, or nondisabled. One of the Deaf students did not check the disabled box, which required the application to be re-done, as the funding was reserved for “students with disabilities”. The fact remains that the Deaf Community is not disabled, but, in order to receive accommodations within society, the label is often their only available ticket for admission.

**Participant 6.** She feels strongly that “normal” is a term invented by non-disabled people, and is a result of their inability to understand and lack of knowledge about anyone different than themselves. Similarly, the concept of normal’s antithesis, “disabled”, lives in the same vein. In her view, the persistent resistance to understanding those with differences from the majority is an opposition born of ignorance and fear of confronting and learning about diversity in the world at large. As a result of the artificial merit of the very concept at its base, she finds the label “disabled” both oppressive and offensive.
**Participant 7.** Participant 7 sees the term “disabled” as one that elicits a certain privilege. While she does not accept the term as a comment about ability, and recognizes how fortunate she is to be in her position as someone that is smart, educated, mobile, etc., when the word itself opens access to rights and protections from discrimination, it provides value. She said that she is not comfortable with the word when used as a descriptor of someone’s ability, and says that the very concept of referring to someone as “disabled” solely to note that they cannot hear, rather than only as a means to access, is dehumanizing and not a label she accepts. She feels the term should be used, without personification, solely as a description of a type of access needed, and should never be applied to a person’s identity.

**The meaning of “normal”**

**Question Type(s):** *What does the word “normal” mean to you?*

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 equates being “normal” to being “OK”, and feels that it can be applied generally to most people without additional comment.

**Participant 2.** The request to describe the meaning of the word “normal” was met with a long pause, and laughter in Participant 2, though this gave the impression that time was needed to articulate a response. In her opinion, “normal” means someone that can fit within the expectations of functional society, a state of being where nothing is “wrong”. She said she feels that she is normal as a Deaf person, and that there is nothing wrong with her; therefore, she personifies what it means to be normal. Finally, her demeanor is comfortable, light, and confident in her description.

**Participant 3.** According to Participant 3, there is no such thing as normal. It has nothing to do with ability; the theory is flawed and immaterial.
Participant 4. Participant 4 shares the view that the word “normal” can mean anyone, and is not limited to one standard for a group of people; rather, it is a reference to both everyone and no one.

Participant 5. He looks pensive when answering this question, and then laughs and says, with a note of irony, that psychiatrists will say that the word pertains on a bell curve to sixty eight percent of the population. Generally speaking, he says he tries to avoid using the term; it denotes something that is seen frequently and something [someone] that aligns with expectations.

Participant 6. “‘Normal’ is a societal invention.” Not only is it an “invention”, it is a word that is impossible to define, as its meaning is an argument that exists between politicians, educators, the mainstream media, and social media. However, generally speaking, she perceives that when the word is used, it is most often as a vehicle to convey the perspective of a hearing, white male. The term normal is most often used by those that are “ableist” in nature; and, in that regard, she typically writes off whatever comes of it as not representative of a worldview that pertains to her.

Participant 7. To her, the term “normal” has become sullied, because it is largely used in the context of referring to something about a person that needs to be “fixed” in order to reflect those around them. She feels a focus on what it means to be “normal” risks destroying the essence of a person. It is used to minimize others when they do not fit whatever someone defines as normal parameters of what or who people should be. This inherently means that those that do not align with someone(s)’ perception of normal are punished by design. She gives an example of her own experience in which she has been
told, “you’re smart for a black person”, insinuating that black people are “normally” less intelligent.

Not only is it not appropriate, but she also reflects on the amount of perceived responsibility that puts on not only herself, but on every other person of any particular group. The notion that assumptions about an entire race or group can based on one person’s behavior in that one moment of interaction with the nonmember of the group is unrealistic and audaciously inaccurate. The concept of normal is dangerous, dehumanizing, and demoralizing, because it is applied in such a way as to make someone smaller while the person that sees themselves as normal gains power from the deflation of those around them. She further notes that she takes issue with the phrase, “let deaf people live a normal life”. In and of itself, that concept is also exclusionary; normal life means there are ups and downs, challenges, wins and defeats; as deaf people have their own agency, they should be expected and allowed to follow suit in their own cadence.

Experiences with Audism

Education

Question Type(s): How did you learn sign language? Did you go to a deaf school, or a mainstream school? If you went to a deaf school, were your teachers mostly deaf or hearing? What was the ASL fluency of your instructors? If you went to a hearing school, how did you access the information, through an interpreter, lip reading, etc.?

Participant 1. She struggled to understand a great deal in school until she began to interact with Deaf adults who used ASL fluently. Growing up, she was exposed to what she refers to as the “old philosophy” of teaching, where hearing teachers are employed to teach deaf students, and use S.E.E. sign, signing exact English, in a manual
movement to accompany English words and sentence structure. S.E.E. sign is described by Wilbur (2009) as “artificially created signing systems for classroom use.” (p. 245). She describes her interaction with Deaf peers as her saving grace to gaining language and comprehension. She learned as much by socializing as she did by teaching other deaf students in a community-based “language co-op”.

She was in a self-contained deaf class until she gained basic education in math and English, and was then transferred to a mainstream education environment with an interpreter. She also identified her speech teacher as a role in her schooling environment that created an inhibiting factor to her education. She was instructed to replace more complex or advanced vocabulary for simple words, and she feels this placed a ceiling on her access to the breadth of synonyms and spelling skills necessary for comprehensive fluency of the English language. Rather than encourage her to learn, she was minimalized, and those aspects of her education failed her in ways that she still works to overcome today. She has used her own experience to advise teachers to meet deaf students at their own level, and, instead of keeping them there, to encourage them to rise to their potential.

**Participant 2.** In response to the question, “How did you learn to sign?”, the participant expresses, with a firm nod of the head in a show of pride, that she learned by socializing with other deaf students in the dorm, and that no one had to “teach” her to use ASL. She became deaf in the middle of the school year, and, at the time, the policy at the local deaf school was that children were only permitted to enter school in the fall at the start of the school year. As a result, she had to miss a half of a year of schooling because she was deaf. She was told that signing made you “look like a monkey”. She described
liking the experience of socializing with other deaf children, but the staff at the dorms as “abusive”, resulting in her hating her schooling experience. She was bounced from setting to setting, from a one room school, to a self-contained classroom, and then, finally, back to a deaf school through graduation.

She experienced firsthand the evolution of the education system, as laws for equal education were passed during her formative years, opening up options for her with each transition. Even at the deaf school, the hearing teachers outnumbered the deaf teachers, and the dominant belief at the time was that teachers were to use vocal English and sign at the same time, meaning that the language modeled was signed English, rather than proper American Sign Language. Relief washes over her face when she describes having deaf teachers that could sign, coupled by a palatable distain for the lack of sign skill, clarity, and ability to communicate on the part of her hearing teachers. She describes her education as something that she “survived”.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 graduated from a deaf school, but did briefly attend a mainstream classroom with an interpreter. He expressed a strong preference for the environment of the deaf school, and is generally happy and appreciative of his education.

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 began her education in an oral school, after which she was moved to a school that used cued speech. Cued Speech is “a system of hand gestures that supplement information available through speechreading alone” (Krause, 2017). When that environment failed to meet her education needs, she was put into a deaf school. She was transferred to a mainstream school, in a self-contained deaf classroom, where she learned to sign English, but did not have access to actual ASL as a component of her education. Her teacher signed only English and was not fluent in ASL.
Participant 5. Participant 5 attended a large mainstream, oral program for the deaf. It was in close proximity to the local deaf school, and, while he had some exposure to signed English language there, he did not actually “learn” ASL until he entered college. As soon as he learned ASL, he engrossed himself completely into the language and world of the Deaf. It was after his immersion into ASL and socialization with academics for the deaf that he grew a thirst for education that resulted in his successful pursuit of a Ph.D., and his career as a professor at a university for the deaf.

Participant 6. Participant 6 was placed into an oral deaf school, and said that she and her fellow deaf students invented signs to communicate with each other in a type of dorm-based “home sign” system. Home signs are developed by deaf people from hearing families that do not use ASL, usually by deaf children, in the absence of any traditional language as a series of invented gestures to communicate (Coppola & Newport, 2005). However, in the classroom, they were only permitted to use speech production and lip reading to communicate. She felt both happy and included socially in this environment. In third grade, she was moved to a different school that had a deaf program within a hearing school and used “total communication”, or signing manual words in English word order. Total communication is the philosophy that advocates “that children will be more successful academically if they are exposed to visuo-spatial language as well as auditory language” (Connor, Hieber, Arts, & Zwolan, 2000, p. 1185).

She progressively moved into more mainstream classes than the deaf, self-contained classes. This required the use of interpreters, all of whom, in her words, were unqualified to serve as a language conduit to a young person’s education. At this point, her mother presented her with a choice: either stay in the mainstream program that was
further from home, but had a deaf program with other deaf students, or attend the local public school where she would be the only deaf student. The choice was further complicated by the fact that the school with the deaf program did not allow for her to participate in sports, because the district would not provide late bussing from the further location. In the end, she chose to be the sole deaf student in an all-hearing school in order to take advantage of an opportunity to play sports. She chose personal interest over commonality in order to continue to give rise to her own vision for herself. As it turned out, there was another deaf student, also oral in background, and a year older, that started the same year. It was a small community, rural school, and she was able to choose her own interpreters. She says she chose based on the personality of the candidates, rather than on language ability, but she was a young middle school child, and the fact that the interpreters were well liked helped facilitate less of a sense of isolation. Her social circles are remembered fondly, and she credits the small size of both community and school with her ability to fit in and not feel excluded from the larger group. The quality of the people interpreting created a positive environment; however, their lack of language was limiting and often meant that they fingerspelled English words in place of any legitimate sign language. She was not provided an interpreter to facilitate communication when she was a member of the sports teams until her senior year, meaning she only had signed language access to education environments and not social settings.

**Participant 7.** Participant 7 attended both deaf and mainstream schools, and reflects both on the value that learning sign language at the deaf school brought, and the struggle that was introduced to her education by using less than qualified interpreters in the mainstream classroom. She further notes that white people author all ASL
curriculums. This is a significant point, considering ASL is a visual language, and therefore, the curriculums include pictures and videos, in this case, of mostly white people. It is this lack of language models that black people can relate to that result in little in the way of curriculum inclusion for black, deaf children. She is considering going back for her doctorate in sociolinguistics to develop curriculum that is not only inclusive, but targeted to meet their needs. In her view, minorities, black, deaf, etc., feel internally a sense of identity and pride when taught by models that can personally reflect the students, and are more successful as a result.

**Interpreters**

**Question Type(s):** *If you used an interpreter, what was their fluency? Describe your experience with interpreters?*

**Participant 1.** Her experience with interpreters was initially in a mainstream education environment in which she describes the interpreter as unqualified, lacking fluency in ASL, and functioning in her role only to take advantage of her student as a way to earn money. She feels she was a tool to someone’s employment, and she attributes her lack of proficiency in math to this day with the interpreter not interpreting, but rather giving her the answers to the math questions.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 did not use interpreters in her education setting, and did not provide further comment.

**Participant 3.** The interpreters in education settings functioned as teacher aids as much as they did interpreters for Participant 3. He did not seem concerned about the skillset of the interpreters, stating that they must have been acceptable, because he was able to access a suitable education, as noted by his current, successful graduate school
experience. He shrugged quite a bit during his responses, and described the experience of using interpreters in education settings as one that resulted in the interpreters overstepping their role, creating a power dynamic, and controlling the classroom setting, rather than serving their actual duty as the language and cultural bridge in the classroom.

**Participant 4.** An interpreter was not a factor for Participant 4 until she reached the eighth grade, and, when she did, she describes the interpreter as “lousy”. This same unqualified interpreter followed her from eighth grade through high school graduation, serving as the only lens (barrier) through which she gained education. However, she did have a positive experience with her teacher of the deaf, whom also followed her through to graduation. Ironically, her teacher of the deaf, who was also hearing, signed better than her interpreter. She references the lack of skill and oppressive attitude of the interpreter she was saddled with as a direct experience with audism.

Though not related to education, she expanded to note that she still has to fight for the provision of an interpreter every time she goes to the hospital. When (if) an interpreter has arrived in a healthcare setting, they have been grossly unqualified. One in particular that she used as an example of many similar experiences, misunderstood most of what she said, could not sign well, and, yet, at the conclusion of the doctor’s appointment, proceeded to walk to the checkout desk and schedule the participant’s next doctor appointment without consulting her, and around the interpreter’s own schedule. She states that this overbearing and controlling, patronizing attitude is an example of audism within the field of interpreting that she has experienced on a sadly regular basis. She told another story of having a female-specific appointment where undressing was required, and where the hospital brought in an unqualified, male interpreter. When she
asked him to leave, uncomfortable to be wearing only a paper gown with a man in the room, he refused and argued with her until he had to be asked to leave by another professional.

**Participant 5.** While first learning sign as a young adult, Participant 5’s impression of interpreters was one of appreciation of the resource and access they provided. However, after attending graduate school, and becoming fluent in ASL himself, he reflected on his first experiences with interpreters in a higher education environment, and realized, in retrospect, that his bar for interpreters had been very low. While perhaps better than no accommodation, the interpreters’ skills and language production during his formative years in school were a far cry from what is required to create an even playing field with his hearing student peers.

**Participant 6.** Participant 6 describes her experience with interpreters in school as one that was poor and “disruptive to the learning process.” The interpreter was not fluent in sign language, and would often overstep her role from that of a language bridge to one that became a controlling force in the classroom, superseding both the free will of the deaf students and the authority of the classroom teacher. As an example, the interpreter placed themselves in the back of the classroom and to one side, so that the deaf students could not see both the interpreter and the instructor speaking. If the student were to look away from the interpreter toward the teacher, the interpreter would kick her desk. If the interpreter did not approve of the level of attentiveness from the students, they would take it upon themselves to “punish” the students by holding them back from other activities, such as gym class, without consulting the teacher. She commented that, as a
middle school student, she did not have any power in a situation where an adult dictated the environment and the rules within.

**Participant 7.** Interpreters were Participant 7’s first language models, but they signed English rather than ASL. She notes that she had always assumed that the interpreters she had through her primary education were qualified. It was not until she saw what true qualified, professional interpreting entailed, when she entered Gallaudet University as a college student, that she realized that she had been receiving subpar access to language her entire life. She has since learned how prevalent it is in an education environment for interpreters to look down on deaf students as less than capable, and this well-intentioned oppression has contributed to the disparity that exists for deaf people in society today.

**Personal perspectives on audism**

**Question Type(s):** How has audism affected your life? Is there one particular experience with audism that stands out for you? What factors have contributed to the oppression of Deaf people?

**Participant 1.** The first response to a request for an example of how audism has impacted Participant 1 personally was again a reference back to being taken advantage of by interpreters using their “privilege” solely to use her deafness to make money. She emphasizes that this taking advantage of her was done without offering her education, or access to language in exchange. She also said that hearing college students in the ASL classes she teaches assume that, because she is deaf, she could be easily fooled into grade manipulation or diverting from the criteria outlined in the syllabus. She describes having to stand up and advocate for herself on a regular basis for respect that is given freely to
the hearing population. She stresses the importance of inclusiveness for all members of
the Deaf Community, regardless of signing ability or education, as a way to begin to
combat the proliferation of rampant Audism. She says that together, the Deaf Community
is stronger.

Participant 2. Participant 2 states that audism is a system problem. Deafness was
historically viewed as something to be pitied, a reason to create a dichotomy of “us”
(hearing), and “them” (deaf). This paradigm resulted in a hearing majority taking a power
position within society, made exponentially worse by leaders such as Alexander Graham
Bell, who championed an oralism movement that sought to both remove ASL from the
Deaf Community and prevent deaf people from marrying each other in a move for the
elimination of genetic deafness courtesy of eugenics. She said that this division created a
need to label states of deafness, such as deaf, hard of hearing, oral, etc. She noted that
these labels were divisive and demeaning, stating one example where deaf children in
oral programs were taught that deaf people who used sign language to communicate were
like “monkeys”. She refers to the “crab theory” as a depiction of what the system created
with the objective to make the community weak without the ability to create a unified
front in a fight for rights. “Crab theory” is summarized by McDermid (2017) as a “theory
which involved the disparagement of others for self-advancement by Deaf Community
members”.

As examples of division within the community, she notes higher status applied to
oral process in deaf children versus the deaf that use ASL. She also references the
converse in examples of educated Deaf adults looking down on the “grass roots” deaf
community that are vocationally, rather than academically, trained. She said that not only
does society need to address the treatment of deaf people, but the Deaf Community needs to take ownership for fixing itself internally as well. She draws parallels between the division within the community to those types of divisions within the gay and lesbian community, referencing the occurrences of those that are gay or lesbian turning against one another, or excluding those that are transgendered from factions of the community.

She credits the lackadaisical approach to education systems for deaf children for the perpetual barriers to change for the deaf. Society, at present, sees deaf people as a people that need to be fixed, told what to do and prevented from having any collective or personal power. While she is willing, able, and committed to fighting against audism, she states that this crusade has caused her to risk her job. At one point, she decided to resign her position as a K-12 teacher rather than be fired for advocating for herself. Her body language and facial expression become notably more serious during this topic discussion. She attributes experiences with audism for a bout of severe depression. While her personal life had a litany of challenges at the time, she said that the oppression at work sent her into a downward spiral. She further expands that the audist-laden environment at work “destroyed her spirit and robbed her of the ability to feel joy”. This happened in spite of the fact that she was working in a deaf school, in a deaf world (where those types of oppression are not ‘supposed’ to happen).

She became very concerned that her resulting affect would negatively impact her students, and had to work twice as hard to keep the impact of her experience out of her classroom. To combat the depression, she took a leave of absence from work to seek help and to heal enough to gather her internal strength once more to serve as an advocate for herself in her environment. Through that experience, the coping mechanism she
developed was one of resignation, realizing that “it was not going to change,” so she would have to learn to brush it off and not let it influence her view of herself. She is proud of her perseverance and her decision to leave when she had concluded she had had enough. However, there was a significant economic effect to the ultimate result of her journey to being “OK”, because she had to give up her employment to be so.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 describes his answer to the question of audism through an explanation of his family dynamic. He said that he has asked himself in recent years the question, “Do I feel close to my family?” This is a seemingly innocuous question, but the answer to it was as powerful as it was simple: “they don’t know my favorite color”. He said he would not call that “audism” per se, but the lack of sharing a language cost him, and them, a relationship. He added that he knows what they “do”, in the sense that he can visually see them cook, fix things, etc. However, he provides that he does not know who or what they are internally as people, their hobbies, the books they like to read, nor what topics they would find interesting enough to debate with him as only a few examples as the chasm between them. In general, he does not have an intimate connection with who his extended family is as individuals. He did mention that seeing their posts, and their seeing his posts, on Facebook has degraded the barrier some, in the sense that it is a glimpse into what they would each not have known about each other in the absence of a social media outlet.

The way that interpreters have control over access to education and often violate their role in the classroom is a form of audism. He currently works at a deaf school, and the hearing teachers and interpreters that also work there will speak without signing to each other, which excludes both deaf staff and students. He commented that their
inability to “get it,” even in an environment that was designed to be signing-only, reflects the insidious depth of audism. Regardless of their intent to work in a deaf environment, their seemingly oblivious exclusionary behavior is one that classifies them as audists. He attributes the origin of audism purely to the difference in primary language. The inability to communicate between the two groups [deaf and hearing] created an oil and water dynamic, such that it failed to allow them to come together so the “music flowed”. In response to how he addresses audism in his daily life, he said that he changed the dynamic. Rather than, as he had when he was young, pointing to his ears, demonstrating that he was deaf, he gestures that he does not speak, and it equalizes the power in the communication. By not “accommodating hearing people” any longer, he is able to interact on a level that he dictates through conversation on pen and paper, instead of the other way around.

Player 4. Participant 4 provided many examples of audism, ranging from people refusing to write with her to communicate and hanging up on her when she makes phone calls using relay, to, most significantly, a lack of ability to find sustainable employment. She states that as soon as she requests an interpreter for a job interview, she is told they will “get back to her”, and they never do. Some of her most horrific experiences as a victim of audism take place in healthcare settings, a place where it is arguably the most important to have access to communication and equal treatment.

Player 5. Audism is something that is discussed frequently, and, even working in a “Deaf friendly” environment, is part of Participant 5’s everyday experience. There are experiences in the past of both himself and his students that are overtly discriminatory, such as a deaf person who uses relay to make an appointment to see an
apartment only to find that the landlord hangs up on them because they do not want to deal with a tenant that is deaf. He provides a personal example from his experience applying for a required internship for his Ph.D. While he disclosed that he was deaf on his application, they overlooked it, and, when he requested an interpreter for the interview, they cancelled the interview. There are also far subtler, but equally as oppressive, examples of audism. In a deaf higher education employment environment, where he works, if there is a committee of all hearing members, it is left as is. If there is a committee of all deaf members, the college requires that half of the committee members be hearing. Similarly, if a hearing person is chairing a committee, they may do it alone, but if there is a deaf chair, they are frequently required to include a hearing co-chair. He says deaf people have to work harder to earn trust as an equal agent in the same environment.

This type of disparity is something he feels is always present for deaf people, and is an example of what he refers to as “micro-inequalities”. He attributes the tentacles of overt audism to three main roots. First, accommodating, or working with, a deaf person is too much work. Second, the general population has a greater tendency to trust that a deaf person knows what is best for themselves than the actual professionals that work in a field serving deaf people. As one explanation, he offers his theory that perhaps this is a response to the diversity of education, abilities, and language of the deaf community at large. Much of the community are underserved, undereducated, and lack the skills and foundation to navigate everyday life as a result. Therefore, the failings in the system for deaf individuals, at the very onset, is what has defined the deaf people that the hearing professionals in the fields involving the deaf work with, and a disparate vantage point has
been transposed onto all deaf people as a result. This lens casts immediate doubt onto any successful deaf person they may meet. That lens has allowed a form of audism to take root from inside the walls of the community.

There is a professional paradigm of hearing people that work with the deaf: they themselves become the glass ceiling that cannot get out of the way for many Deaf people to flourish and succeed without being “helped” by well-meaning, hearing professionals. Participant 5 remarked that “Often the very people that are there to support deaf people are the ones that hold us down.” The real challenge is navigating life and the achievement of personal and professional goals as a Deaf person in that environment, without reacting in a negative way and thus confirming their expectations. The level of tolerance required to use his experiences with audism as teachable moments, educating the professionals in the field of deafness, is at times a daunting feat.

**Participant 6.** Anytime she sees the phrase “I’ll tell you later”, or “It’s not important”, Participant 6 associates them with the concept of Audism. She feels her experience is somewhat nuanced in that she describes herself as both an “extrovert” and an “optimist” that tends to see the good in people at first brush. However, she takes it as a personal insult any time she is considered what she calls “not worthy”, and, in her opinion, society as a whole sees deaf people as lacking in value. However, she remains hopeful for change, and her response to someone exhibiting audist behavior is to educate him or her. By challenging their assumptions, she strives, and often achieves, in making those same people confront their assumptions in a positive way.

**Participant 7.** She has begun to notice that there is a series of rifts in the Deaf Community that compound the issue of audism. There has been a noticeable fracturing of
sorts within the Deaf Community where status has been applied to those that are hard-of-hearing, or those that can sign well, versus those that cannot, or are oral. She said that these types of divisiveness in the community are a symptom of a larger internalized indication of audism. In other words, the oppression the Deaf Community has experienced has resulted in an internalizing of that oppression, and a turning in on itself, exemplified by a rejection of the variations within their own community. As a result, she has seen a growth of hearing and hard of hearing students flock to Gallaudet, but, conversely, has seen a reduction in Deaf student enrollment. She attributes this phenomenon to failings within the systems of education, specifically, how society teaches deaf young people to view themselves. That self-perception, learned from being treated as less than capable since birth, is audism.

Social Justice and Use of Social Media

Social justice, call to action, and social media

Question Type(s): How has social media changed the way that you combat oppression? What is the main purpose for your posts? Who are you targeting, the Deaf Community in a “call to action”, or the hearing community in an education framework? What are your objectives/What do you hope to accomplish by being active online? Does the ability to video recording, rather than written blogs, change the way that you express yourself as a Deaf person? If video were not an option, would you be active in a written blog environment? How would you feel about that?

Participant 1. Participant 1 has not always been a proponent of online mediums. She begins with an explanation that her first experience with Facebook took a negative turn as an example of the potential that living a personal life in public has for opening
oneself up to criticism. However, after a stint off line, she joined again, and notes the power it is has had in drawing groups within the community together in a way that only an online forum can. If an online, video forum was not available, it is unlikely that she would revert back to continued advocacy and social justice movement activity in a written medium. She now uses predominantly Facebook for activism posts. Her stated goals are for network creation, community awareness and education of both the Deaf and hearing communities. Her posts are generally one-directional, informational, and therefore, classified as the type that is aimed at “awareness and advocacy”.

**Participant 2.** For Participant 2, Facebook has opened up the opportunity to participate in a larger forum for bringing issues to light that affect the community. While she initially used social media for entertainment, her experience in higher education opened her eyes to the opportunity to use it as a platform for education of the larger community. Her focus is on human rights related to education of the larger Deaf Community on their rights, as well as to encourage and challenge others to advocate for themselves. She takes largest issue with how far the Deaf Community has left to go to achieve equality in basic rights, such as employment and education. She seeks to spark the community to action.

She also reaches out to the hearing community through encouraging the hearing college students she teaches to watch her vlogs and participate in online social justice movements that advance the awareness and rights of the Deaf. She did say that, were online forums not an option, she would continue to be active through published newspapers. Her work online is bi-directional, seeking feedback and active discourse within the community, and, therefore, can be categorized as “action and reaction”
Internet activism. However, with her sole intent to spark both awareness and advocacy on the part of the community with whom she engages, she can also be considered an “awareness and advocacy” type of activist.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3’s social media posts have been centered around the value he places on deaf schools. The number of deaf schools is diminishing as a result of the criticism the education environment has undergone, but he feels the reverse is actually true. The deaf schools provide the most effective communication and education access available for deaf students today. He feels that the entire deaf education system needs to be revamped, and that the time to change is yesterday. The issue of a widespread lack of qualified interpreters, and grossly infrequent use of Deaf interpreters, shows that the community is currently being given the bare minimum of what is needed to allow for access to communication. He also questions whether certified Deaf interpreters are paid an equal wage to their hearing counterparts.

His vlogs are aimed in general at both Deaf and hearing audiences to encourage thought and attention to the true challenges faced by the Deaf Community, but he adds that he feels more understood by Deaf viewers. He also uses his online activism to promote and encourage attendance at Deaf rallies related to the topics of self-advocacy and mobilization on behalf of a Deaf non-profit organization, of which he sits on the board. While he says he would resort to resisting oppression in a written format if video were not available, he feels that words on a page do not have nearly the power as seeing someone’s face when they are talking about a current issue. His posts are one-directional and education-focused, or a direct call to action and attendance at an on the ground,
mobilized event, and therefore would be categorized as both awareness and advocacy, and organization and mobilization.

**Participant 4.** She often takes to recording a vlog, publicly posted as a way to address the elitism and divide within the Deaf Community itself. She states that Deaf people who are born deaf look down on Deaf people that were either not born deaf or are hard of hearing, and may have less skill with ASL expression than those who have been signing since birth. She says that the community is too small, and under too much firepower, to afford to turn in upon itself. Her vlogs are geared toward a Deaf audience exclusively. She loves the instant feedback provided in an online forum. She also hosts in-person rallies for the Deaf Community, and she said that she has encountered some people within the community that are hesitant to attend or speak up, because they worry that by taking a stand for their rights, they will put their employment in jeopardy. As a result, a large percent of her advocacy work is educating the Deaf to recognize the power of self-advocacy and the protections they are entitled to.

She agrees that social justice work has a place through video logs online, and, were it not available, she would not participate in a written format the same way. However, she also believes that there is an unmistakable, and irreplaceable, power for change that can only be garnered when seated in a room together in person. She describes in detail the difference it makes in shifting thought and dialogue when you are staring into each other’s eyes, and seeing personal experiences through the frame that only a first-person account can offer. This belief is what drives her online work to be centered around organization and mobilization, and is therefore categorized as such.
**Participant 5.** Access to video logs, and expression through a visual medium online, has not only produced a forum where Deaf people can call for, and be called to, action, but, also, according to Participant 5, provides an infusion of strength through a network of other Deaf individuals, both nationally and globally. As a parallel, he brought up “community cultural wealth” and literature on the Latin community. While they may not have the privileges or capital available to white people, they do possess a value in their sense of belonging and community that is uniquely their own. [Although I am saddened to do so, in order to maintain the anonymity committed to participants in this study, the topics specific to his own research around cultural capital and the Deaf have been purposely omitted].

However, specifically relevant to this study is the call to action from his research: Deaf individuals have experiences that should be shared with the community at large, because, through this narrative, a way is paved for a sense of commonality and education that has the power to change the experiences for those that come after them. He would, and does, contribute to the social justice movement for the Deaf in written form, even if the ability to produce video content were not available. However, he does feel that, more than access to social justice empowerment, the ability to connect visually has widened the connections and sense of collective belonging Deaf people can access within their own community. He is quick to emphasize that this connection is not limited to the Deaf in the United States, but that the online access to visual news has also opened the floodgates for international interactions around a shared Deaf experience.

Without online visual connections among Deaf communities around the world, there would be no way to develop a true global sense of self within humankind that
shares your identity and a visual language. He does acknowledge that there has been some criticism of social media action, in that some feel that it has been a main contributor to the closing of many Deaf clubs (Prior to online visual access through technology, Deaf people had to drive to a physical location to organize protests or maintain community connectedness). While there is some truth to that, in its place, there is the possibility of a far wider-reaching impact. As an example, the Deaf Grassroots Movement organized, via online forums, a march on Washington, D.C. The same day, many of the major cities across the United States had the same march, protest and mission as those in D.C.; this widespread mobilization would never have been possible without social media.

He emphasizes that online forums provide a mechanism for others to learn from the best practices, and the mistakes, of others. By doing so, the Deaf Community’s quest for equality moves forward, without the merry-go-round of “one step forward, then two steps back”. Furthermore, in his work, vlogs create a way to reach the isolated deaf students in mainstream high school programs; they are a way to present Deaf role models to children that would not otherwise have any exposure in their formative years. Education and awareness are at the center of Participant 5’s work; therefore, his activism hails from the category of “awareness and advocacy”.

Participant 6. When she addresses activism through social media, Participant 6 does as much for the hearing population as she does for the Deaf Community. She said that she believes that everyone has the right to be educated; she asks the rhetorical question, without addressing both, “how can either learn from the other?”. Moreover, as a contributor to the larger social media dialogue, she adds that she values the feedback that she harvests personally from the larger audience. She casts that net as wide as she can in
order to benefit from a well-rounded view on all sides. She values social media in its contrast to print; she states that it is *not* passive. She also makes a parallel to Facebook and the Deaf Community, in the sense that they both strive for a connection through language that would not be available in the absence of a shared platform of some kind. Facebook creates access to community, and community is what Deaf people fight for on a daily basis. In her view, the other “isms” (racism, sexism, etc.) contribute as much to audism as an oppression of Deaf people does. In other words, all oppression is cut from the same cloth, and one prejudice plants the seeds for another and creates fertile ground for divisiveness and incorrect, hurtful, and dangerous assumptions about one another.

Given only a written medium option, she would continue to participate in a social justice dialogue, but not with the same frequency or depth as an online platform provides. Her posts are informative but seek to elicit a reaction from the audience, and thus can be categorized as “action and reaction” in nature.

*Participant 7.* Participant 7 not only uses social media for her own personal Internet activism, she also says that she has used it as a tool in the classroom of the college students she teaches. She noted that Facebook has become somewhat of a hot topic within the classrooms of the deaf students and the world at large. However, English is still the preferred method of online posts for her deaf students that were raised oral and learned ASL later, because they fear having their ASL critiqued, robbing focus from the message they are delivering. Conversely, Deaf students whose native language is ASL prefer to sign their messaging on social media, but then lack the English skills to add appropriate captioning to the videos, assuming they are aiming to be inclusive and reach a larger audience.
When she personally posts on social media, she does it with the intention of speaking to both the Deaf Community and a wider hearing audience. Not only will hearing people who know little about the Deaf benefit from a call to action and education (around topics such as “diversity”, “cochlear implants”, etc.), but there are a large number of Deaf people that have not had access to being exposed to a wide variety of topics; therefore, with one approach, she can move the ball forward for both groups of society. The exception to this approach is when she posts educational and informational, action-oriented vlogs that target only one group within the larger community, such as black-deaf topics specific to this faction’s experience. In this case, she chooses to use “closed groups” within Facebook that can only be seen by members of that minority group. Once the topics are flushed out within the groups they are speaking to, then they can be brought into a public forum, but out of respect, they will not do so until they have first been discussed and sanctioned from within. She would resort to written English to participate in a social justice movement for the advancement of the Deaf if a video option were not available, but only around topics that she felt were absolutely critical, unlike with vlogs, where she posts frequently and with ease in her natural language of ASL. Depending on the topic she is relaying, Participant 7 actively takes to social media with different objectives and audiences in mind. She vacillates between an approach that is clearly in the category of “awareness and advocacy” and, separately, creates posts with an aim to motivate the Deaf Community, or groups therein, to action, and therefore her activism can also be considered “organization and motivation”.
First wish for the Deaf community: “the sorting of priorities”

**Question Type(s):** If you could change the world for Deaf people in one way, what would you wish for your community?

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 would provide that, at the time of birth, deaf babies (and all babies) would be accepted and supported for exactly how, when, who, and where they are in that moment, and in all the moments that followed. She believes that foundational acceptance would change the entire world for the deaf. They would know from the start that there were no limitations on who and what they could be; therefore, they would only know success.

**Participant 2.** Credit for the title of this section goes to Participant 2, as she was the first to jokingly respond to the question by saying that I was “asking her to sort her priorities.” Her answer was a single word: “jobs”. She said that if jobs in all areas and at all levels, had a cadre of Deaf employees represented within their midst, they would have the power, influence, and visibility to change the systematic issues that are present today in education systems and beyond. She said, in the current state, the Deaf Community is seen as a nuisance, with the required accommodations, interpreters, and the like viewed as too expensive. Deaf employees are largely “stuck,” and confined to few opportunities, or opportunities within a limited scope, such as a deaf school, related non-profit organization, or teaching ASL. She further commented that there were two areas she noticed as major examples of limitations on deaf employment.

The first was the prevalence of unqualified, hearing teachers hired to teach ASL in both high school and college classrooms. This “taking of Deaf jobs” has contributed largely and negatively to the lack of employment opportunities for the Deaf. She notes
that hearing students will frequently graduate with a degree in deaf education, and then, with their newly minted teaching certificate, take a job in a K-12 environment teaching ASL, because they technically have a certificate, and it is easier. This, in spite of only ever having four semesters of ASL, robs qualified, native signing Deaf education professionals of the opportunity for a job perfectly and uniquely suited to them (The fact that one can graduate with a degree in deaf education and only need to take four semesters of ASL is not only the norm, but also a systematic example of Audism in and of itself). Second, there are limited options for employment that allow visual language users to qualify, nor are there many examples of exceptions that would open doors for the Deaf, such as skill-specific certifications for teachers, for example art, without requiring the English-based additional certification exams. As only one example, these types of alternative, non-English based assessments and criteria would lessen the barriers to attaining teacher certification positions for educated Deaf teachers.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3’s answer to this question was as clear as it was curt: “I would cut all mainstream programs for deaf children. Deaf children cannot be alone.”

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 echoed the agenda at the center of the Deaf Grassroots Movement: education, communication, and employment. Second, she added that she would love if all hearing people could sign. She emphasizes that the amount we would learn from each other, as a community, would be transformational in unimaginable ways.

**Participant 5.** If he had to pick one thing, Participant 5 would will that everyone could sign. As an aside, while it does not impact all Deaf people, he said that he has also dreamed of an island where children of Deaf parents, “deaf-of-deaf”, could live together in a community that grew from Deaf people educating Deaf children in their native sign
language. He excitedly wonders how many leaders would be born of that type of uninhibited Deaf society. He further explains that Deaf children that are born to Deaf parents are uniquely failed by our society’s education system. Deaf schools are filled to the brim with deaf students born to hearing parents, with essentially no language by the time they are school-aged, and, therefore, the instruction in the classroom starts from the most basic needs of these students. Deaf children with deaf parents, on the other hand, have a full conceptual and articulated language developed on par with their hearing peer age group, but, as the minority faction in the classroom, they are saddled with waiting for the others to catch up. As a result, they miss the first few years of traditional education. In a mainstream environment, more often than not, the instructors are hearing teachers who do not sign fluently, and these deaf children, with fully developed language and cognitive abilities, are again left behind as a result of the limitations in the system to meet them where they are.

Participant 6. According to Participant 6, signing removes a lot of barriers between the hearing mainstream and the Deaf Community; if she could change one thing for the Deaf, it would be to exponentially increase the number of people who sign fluently.

Participant 7. If she had to impact one component of the Deaf Community, Participant 7 would prioritize an understanding of, and appreciation for, race and diversity within the community, including variations of cultural norms. The unconscious bias within everyone on the topic of race inhibits growth and open dialogue, and, in order to open up wider discussions with wider audiences, the topic of race must be at the forefront.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

Shared themes within the interviewee’s responses underscore the similarities in collective experience with audism, as well as the distinctions that result in different, personal responses to a largely common systematic oppression of Deaf people. The following observations were made within the context of the objectives of the study: to document the lived experience of Deaf people and how they navigate and advocate for recognition of their experience in the face of audism.

Themes Related to Family

Two different participants used the example that their family did not know their favorite color as a way to starkly drive home just how isolating a language divide in a family can be for a Deaf person. All seven participants expressed feelings of outsider status in their hearing families, particularly during holiday gatherings. This commonality was not in relation to the hearing status of their family members, but rather in the weak, or complete lack of, sign language ability, and the absence of any significant effort to learn. While participants seem to have come to terms with those feelings to varying degrees, those with larger families-Participants 1, 6 and 7-had more examples of being isolated from family inclusion growing up. Those remaining Participants with relatively small families expressed more feelings of either indifference, having replaced the belonging to a family of origin with the Deaf Community, or resignation.

Themes Related to Identity

An obvious theme across all participant responses is that they identify as culturally Deaf individuals. What is interesting, however, is that an almost equally overt
dichotomy emerged around the timing in which that identity began to take shape, and with what catalyst. For the participants that attended a deaf school at a young age, or had Deaf family members—Participants 2, 3 and 4—their identity as a Deaf person appears to have developed at a young age, and been carried through into adulthood. Participants 1, 5, 6 and 7, all stated that they embraced their membership within a collectivist culture and shared experience and identity as a young adult, but, even then, not until after they had been exposed fully to the Deaf Community.

**Themes on the Perspective of “Disabled” as a Label**

While none of the participants readily embrace being called disabled, nor do they accept that the Deaf Community is disabled, there is a general consensus that society is not a place where deaf people are on equal footing in areas of rights such as education, language access, employment, etc. Therefore, they collectively give a pragmatic nod to the term “disabled” as an articulation necessary to qualify for the rights and accommodations they are entitled to while they fight for complete egalitarianism.

**Themes occurring from the Meaning of “Normal”**

The Participants had a very matter-of-fact response to the theory of “normal”; in general, the consensus was that the word or notion itself carries little meaning. Broadening the archetype of what it means to be normal to include definitions of what it also means to be Deaf risks society recognizing similarities between those that are Deaf and those that are hearing. Seeing human similarities in another has sparked the misinformed zero-sum game viewpoint, which is the idea that recognizing the equal humanity and rights of another somehow costs the majority something. Therefore, as with any minority, Deaf people are fighting an uphill battle to expand the parameters of
normal sufficiently to be conceded membership. Communication, respect and understanding are agreed to among the participants as the tools necessary to continue this expansion and path to inclusion.

**Themes Stemming from Education**

Interestingly, without exception, each participant relayed an experience throughout his or her education as one of significant transience. They switched not only schools, but education philosophies, language and approaches to educating deaf students, in some cases, multiple times throughout their primary and secondary education tenure.

This seems to demonstrate that the hearing community, educational institutions, and hearing parents of deaf children are largely at a loss, and, at a minimum, lack consensus on the most successful approach to deaf education. Participant 3 and Participant 6 presented two distinctions from the others in that they reflect on their education as a positive and inclusive experience. However, the common thread between them is one of a small community: in the case of Participant 3, through the majority of his education at a deaf school, and Participant 6, in a small, rural town environment. All unanimously agree that the experience for deaf, school-aged children can, and should be, improved upon in momentous ways via total, natural access to education through the visual linguistic medium of ASL.

**Themes on the use of Interpreters**

A glaring theme among all participants’ reflection on interpreters was the contradiction between what an interpreter is supposed to be—a gateway to inclusion and communication for the deaf—and what they are too often—an oppressive role that deprives deaf people of agency and personal power. An underlying tone in the responses echoed a
deaf position with unqualified interpreters as one of a victim in the wake of some hearing interpreters who are “using” the deaf community to take jobs, without being qualified to earn money, and at the expense of their deaf clients. The notion of “overstep” by interpreters was present in each interview, though it should be noted, as was mentioned in the interview with both Participant 5 and 7, that the critique is aimed at those that are unqualified to interpret, not professional interpreters in general. Sadly, as each participant provided several examples of unqualified interpreters, particularly during their education years, the issues of overstep and oppression in the field of interpreting appears to be quite the epidemic.

It seems that the bend in the field of interpreting toward those unqualified among them abusing their power and demeaning the agency of Deaf clients is an easy parallel to the larger notion of patriarchy. Kincade (2013) asserts that the “opposite of patriarchy is democracy and feminism is an encompassing liberation movement.” (p. 278). Democracy requires an equal vote not currently available for the Deaf Community that relies on interpreters, and yet, do not often control the fluency and professional quality of the interpreters they have access to. The movement against audism and toward Deafhood is another liberation movement, and addressing the interpreting profession at large appears one logical place to begin to address the rampant, systematic oppression of Deaf people.

**Themes on Audism**

It is particularly noteworthy that all participants were able to readily provide what seemed to be an unending list of experiences with audism, and that each of them used a sign for the concept of “oppression” as their sign for the word “audism.” In a thread throughout each interview on this topic, there was a parallel to the discussion around the
use of the term *disabled*. While it is begrudgingly accepted in many ways, because it allows for access and accommodations, it also represents the present moment in time where the community is consigned to a subpar position, but not in such a way that is glaringly obvious to the larger public. All resoundingly agreed that society can and should do better. Accepting labels, such as *disabled*, are a necessary evil for now, but only as the proverbial “band aid over a bullet hole”, a hole that is audism. The temporary fixes, such as a legal provision for accommodations that are seen as “good enough”, have resulted in a widespread inattention on the part of society to address the disparate treatment of Deaf people and underscore the importance of taking the fight for equality to a public-facing forum, such as social media platforms.

**Themes that Motivate Social Justice Action**

It was interesting that five of the seven participants would continue their activism work in the absence of an online, video forum; however, they would do so far less frequently, and two of them would not do so at all. This seems to indicate that the availability of Internet activism, by way of video contribution in ASL, has significantly impacted the way and strength in which the Deaf Community advocates for their own social justice movement and the rights this movement entails. As such, it stands to reason that technology has catapulted the movement toward equality for the Deaf Community. Furthermore, all participants share what appeared to be a large bias toward aiming their activism online toward their Deaf peers, indicating their collective passion for the power of unified mobilization for change birthed by the community itself.

In addition to garnering themes among the social justice action of the participants, this research sought to categorize that action into one of three categories of Internet
activism: “awareness/advocacy”, “organization/mobilization”, and/or “action/reaction” (Vegh, 2013). Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of participants had at least one component of “awareness/advocacy” as a central driving force behind their social justice work. The disparity in the treatment of the Deaf Community is largely overlooked and change cannot materialize until they are seen and recognized as a community with a unique language and cultural identity deserving of agency and equality. The resulting categorization of the Internet activism among the participants of this study is illustrated below in Table 2.4.

Table 5

*Categorization of Internet Activism Among Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Awareness/Advocacy</th>
<th>Organization/Mobilization</th>
<th>Action/Reaction</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Participant 2</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
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<td>Participant 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Themes Emerging from Priorities**

Using the framework of Case Study, in that the experiences of the participants guide the process, the answers provided in relation to each participant’s dominant wish for their community provided invaluable insight into opportunities for further research and exploration where true, community-wide, change is the objective. The essential commonality in the responses to this question resulted less from what exactly was said, though I was pleasantly surprised that there were several different answers to this
question. All Deaf participants in this study prioritized what all people, deaf, Deaf or hearing, value most: to be seen, to be respected as an equal, and to be understood.

**Opportunities for Further Research**

Once the Deaf Community is successfully de-marginalized, there are spaces that open up to consider the convergence of cultural Deafness and race, gender, and a multifaceted identity (Lennard J. Davis, 1995, p. 161). There is plenty of room for additional research once the Deaf are fully humanized and recognized as a linguistic minority community. One such example is presented through a story that one of the participants told me during our interview. Suppose a study were conducted using two groups with disparate views on deafness, one group inclusive of solely Deaf people who embrace their cultural and linguistic identity, and the other comprised of oral deaf, who are philosophically opposed to communicating using sign language, and prefer to amalgamate into the mainstream, hearing society. If the two groups were tasked with sharing their viewpoints in an open forum online, would their interaction change their perspectives of the opposite view?

The participant told the story of a group discussion on the topic of the importance of deaf children accessing ASL from a young age. One of the members in her group expressed that she had been happy growing up orally. As she was the lone voice defending an oralism approach, the group responded by saying that, by not signing, she had something “stolen” from her. She, however, felt strongly that she had chosen not to sign, and did not want to. For the Participant, the conviction in the oral woman’s perspective introduced the notion that there is validity and choice accessible in more than one communication paradigm. Following the discussion, the group went to a restaurant.
The Participant sat next to the oral deaf woman, and noticed she was struggling trying to be understood by the server using her speech. The Participant gestured, on her behalf, to the server to bring a pen and paper. She told the oral woman, “Don’t ‘work’ for hearing people, level the playing field with a pen, and make them come to you.” The woman seemed surprised and grateful for the advice. Both the Participant and the oral woman were impacted that day in a positive way by seeing the world through the other’s eyes. Inclusion takes a village, and every perspective has something to offer about respect, appreciation, and personal, individual need. That sharing of perspectives has the power to start the process to shake off the shackles of audism from within the community itself.

The sky is surely the limit for topics pertaining to social justice and the Deaf. However, a few other opportunities for additional, continued exploration came to mind during the time I spent with each of the participants in this study. Those opportunities are related to voices from subsets of the Deaf Community that have not yet been fully recorded in the literature. For example, the Deaf-blind members of the Deaf Community have the same, and arguably more, needs in the area of social justice. Yet, they cannot see the video blogs, and need a tactile format for communicating needs and receiving feedback around those needs. How can the dialogue, organic to the Deaf advocating for social change, be expanded to include the participation of the Deaf-blind among them?

With only one participant of color, there were not enough contextualized perspectives to draw any thematic relevance from the intersection that is born from being both culturally Deaf and culturally black. Most especially evident in response to questions around identity is the fact that there is more to be understood from the stories unique to this particular population.
The timing, both early and later on in life, in which a person embraces *Deaf* as a dominant identity seems to have merit and be worthy of further analysis. It would be interesting to attempt to correlate self-confidence with age of acceptance of, and pride in, self-identifying as Deaf. The consistently poor experiences of the participants with interpreters underscore the need to understand the impact that the skill of interpreters have on their Deaf consumers. When interpreters see themselves as “helpers”, they model helplessness in the deaf children they are there to serve. The participants in this study agree with the literature on this topic: Deaf students often suffer as a result of the low expectations that greet them. One example, provided by Participant 1, offers a demonstration of this phenomenon in her description of her education interpreter removing complex writing skills and vocabulary in their interpretation to the deaf students. A study to determine what, if any, deficits are born from inconsistent interpreting skills in the education environment for the deaf could provide a catalyst for more stringent screenings of interpreters prior to placing the education for our deaf children in their hands. Furthermore, additional research is needed to compare the linguistic age to the chronological age of deaf children, in order to measure the impact of audism and a lack of consistent language access in education settings (Siegel, 2008, p. 30).

**Conclusion**

The theory of Cuff (2006), the “emancipatory discourse,” illustrates that the Deaf Community, often through their work in online, social media, have established their rights as a “separatist movement” and are on the battle grounds of the “inclusionist chapter”. They are fighting for equal admittance into the same privilege and respect
afforded to the mainstream, hearing majority. They do so on the precipice of the third, and final, chapter, the “transgressive stage”, in which equality is attained. Of all interviewees, Participant 3 had the most favorable experience in reaction to each topic presented by the interview questions. He was also the only participant from a Deaf family, adding weight to the premise that deaf people need cultural and linguistic validation and access to their world for quality of life and uninhibited identity development and ease of success. This study ensued by way of a series of conversations with Deaf individuals to answer two questions: 1. "How has experiencing audism affected the lives of Deaf people?", and 2. "How has the use of social media as a platform to fight against audism through natural linguistic expression in American Sign Language impacted that experience?".

In answer to the first question, it was clear, during literally every minute of the interviews conducted, that audism is a powerful and oppressive force that those who are deaf face on a daily basis. After weeks of seeing story after story relayed by those interviewed, it seems that even the proverbial “glass ceiling” is not a strong enough anecdote to relay the limits placed on deaf people, beginning the moment they are born. They are faced with a barrier more analogous to a steel door in their encounters with the medical profession, education experiences, language expression and access, opportunities for a sense of familial belonging, and autonomy through employment. There was also a strong affirmative response to illustrate that the advent of visual social media outlets has created a chink in the armor that society brandishes to keep out social change or the concession of power to any population other than the majority.
This study demonstrates an acknowledgement and validation that audism can be added to the types of inequality plaguing our society, and that social media plays a role in combating that inequity. However, it equally establishes that we have a long way to go in building a bridge to meet the Deaf Community where, and as, they are. If our larger systems, education, medicine, and cultural recognition allowed for uninhibited agency for the Deaf, what an incredible opportunity for learning and relationships it would offer the deaf and the hearing! It is my hope, and the hope of those that donated their time to share their stories, that studies like this one begin to lay a framework on which to build just such a bridge.
References


10.1145/1749603.1749606


Appendix A: Participant Recruitment E-Mail

Title of the Study: The use of social media as a conduit to promote social justice in the Deaf Community, as a cultural and linguistic minority, through the visual language of American Sign Language: A movement against Audism.

Principal Investigator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name, Degree:</th>
<th>Sarah Glenn-Smith, MBA, MA, ABD- Conflict Analysis and Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mailing Address:</td>
<td>34 Coolidge Drive, Amherst, NY 14226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Phone:</td>
<td>716-868-3621 (FaceTime/text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact E-mail:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:SGlennSmith@gmail.com">SGlennSmith@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions about this study should be directed to:

Institutional Review Board, Nova Southeastern University Office of Grants and Contracts
Phone: (954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790, and/or
Email: IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Description of Study: Sarah Glenn-Smith, MBA, MA- I am a student at Nova Southeastern University, pursuing my doctorate in Conflict Analysis and Resolution. I have worked with and among the Deaf Community for nearly twenty years, and am fluent in American Sign Language. Both my spouse and my daughter are Deaf, and I formerly worked as an interpreter. I continue to maintain my RID CI/CT Certification.

The purpose of this research study is to serve as the basis for a case study analysis of the experience of Deaf activists using online platforms to educate and advocate for issues related to access for and recognition of the Deaf Community. I am specifically interested in your experience combatting Audism through your v-log posts. The research will be published in the form of a dissertation in satisfaction of the final requirement to earn my Ph.D.

Participation Criteria: Participants in this study will be limited to those age thirty and older, who identify as culturally Deaf, use ASL as their primary language, and post self-recorded videos in an online forum, at least one time per month, for the duration of a year or longer, on the topic of taking a stand against Audism.

Participation: I would be honored to speak with you about your experiences. If you are willing and able to participate, the research will take place by way of my interviewing you over Skype or FaceTime, and asking a series of questions about your personal
experience with Audism, biographical questions, as well as your experience using the Internet to share your story with the public. The interview will take approximately one hour, and be scheduled at a time that is convenient for your schedule. You will be provided the questions by email, in advance of the interview.

The interviews will be recorded, then transcribed into written English in order to facilitate the identification of themes across several participant narratives. A Deaf person, native in ASL, will be employed in the translation process of the recorded interview to ensure that the integrity of the message will be preserved.

**RISK TO PARTICIPATION:** There are no overt risks to participating in this study. If any questions during the interview process cause you any discomfort, you may stop the interview or bypass questions, or parts of questions, at your complete discretion. All identifying information will be kept confidential, unless required by law, and will not be included in the published work. Quotes, or direct, identifying references, will be altered so as to preserve participant anonymity. It is your right to withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason, without question, at which time all information provided by you to that point will be deleted and there will be no record of your participation.

If you have any questions regarding the risks and benefits to participating in this study, please contact the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board, their contact information is provided in the above.

**BENEFIT TO PARTICIPATION:** There will be no personal benefit for your participation in this study, nor will participation be financially compensated. However, the sharing of your experience has the potential to highlight the importance of equal access and respect for Deaf Culture and American Sign Language.

I have read this invitation to participate, fully understand what I have read and voluntarily agree to participate.

By sending, via email, my availability for an interview appointment to the principal researcher, Sarah Glenn-Smith, at SGlenn-Smith@gmail.com, I imply my consent to participate.

Once I receive your email confirming your interest in participating, I will forward you an informed consent document, very similar to the above, for you to read, sign and scan to return to me electronically prior to the interview appointment.

Thank you for your consideration.

With Much Respect,
Sarah Glenn-Smith

3301 College Avenue • Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314-7796
(954) 262-3000 • 800-672-7978 • Fax: (954) 262-3968 • Email: cahss@nsu.nova.edu • Web site: http://cahss.nova.edu
Appendix B: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH STUDY ENTITLED:

The use of social media as a conduit to promote social justice in the Deaf Community, as a cultural and linguistic minority, through the visual language of American Sign Language: A movement against Audism.

FUNDING SOURCE: None

PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:
Sarah Glenn-Smith, MBA, MA, ABD- Conflict Analysis and Resolution
ADDRESS: 34 Coolidge Drive, Amherst, NY 14226
PHONE: 716-868-3621

FOR QUESTIONS/CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH RIGHTS, CONTACT:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT?
The purpose of this research study is to serve as the basis for a case study analysis of the experience of Deaf activists using online platforms to educate and advocate for issues related to access and recognition for the Deaf Community. The research will be published in the form of a dissertation in satisfaction of the final requirement to earn my Ph.D.

WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME?
You are being asked to participate as someone who regularly posts vlogs to a public, online forum on the topic of resisting Audism. I am specifically interested in the lived experience of Deaf individuals who have experienced Audism, and how they have used vlogs to educate or influence the public about Audism. I am looking for approximately eight participants with which to conduct individual, confidential interviews about their experience.

WHAT WILL I BE DOING IF I AGREE TO BE IN THE STUDY?
This research will be conducted in the form of an interview between you and myself, and participation is completely voluntary. The interview will consist of questions related to your background, the types of topics you discuss while creating your own vlogs and the motivation behind the selection of those topics. You will receive a copy of the interview questions, via email, prior to the interview date. You may stop the interview, and decline
to participate at any time. Any questions before, during or after your interview should be directed to the researcher directly, Sarah Glenn-Smith, at SGlennSmith@gmail.com.

**IS THERE ANY AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING?**

The interviews will be recorded, then, using the video recordings, an analysis of the interview is transcribed into written English in order to facilitate the identification of themes across several participant narratives. A Deaf person, native in ASL, will be employed in the translation process to ensure that the integrity of the message will be preserved.

**Initials: ________  Date: ________**

This research project will include video recording of the interview, via a screen recording application that will capture both the interviewer signing the questions, and the participants. This video recording will be available to be seen by the researcher, the Internal Review Board, the dissertation committee Chair, Dr. Berna, and an ASL Specialist that will confirm the researcher’s interpretation from American Sign Language to an English analysis. The ASL Specialist will be used to validate the integrity of any quoted translated text, as well as general analysis of expression of ideals noted in this analysis. The recording will be kept securely in a password protected Google Drive folder. Per requirements, the recording will be kept for a period of three years, after which it will be permanently deleted. The fact that your face and interview will be potentially identifiable by anyone who sees the recording, your confidentiality for things you say (or do) on the recording cannot be guaranteed, although the researcher will limit access to the recorded file as described in this paragraph.

**WHAT ARE THE DANGERS TO ME?**

There are not any overt risks to participating in this study. If any questions during the interview process cause you any discomfort, you may stop the interview or bypass any questions at your complete discretion. All identifying information will be kept confidential, and will not be included in the published work. Quotes, or direct, identifying references will be altered so as to preserve participant anonymity.

If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact Sarah Glenn-Smith at SGlennSmith@gmail.com. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions as to your research rights.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

There will be no personal benefit for your participation in this study. However, the sharing of your experience has the potential to highlight the importance of equal access and respect for Deaf Culture and American Sign Language.

**WILL I GET PAID FOR BEING IN THE STUDY? WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING?**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.
HOW WILL YOU KEEP MY INFORMATION PRIVATE?
All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential, unless the law requires disclosure. Records are only accessible to the Researcher directly, however, if needed, they may be made available for review by the ASL Specialist, IRB, and dissertation committee chair.

WHAT IF I DO NOT WANT TO PARTICIPATE, OR I WANT TO LEAVE THE STUDY?
Participation is appreciated and completely voluntary. You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave, or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study, however, they will not be used as a part of the research.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the principal investigator.

Initials: ________  Date: ________

VOLUNTARY CONSENT BY PARTICIPANT
By signing below, you indicate that:
- This study has been explained to you.
- You have read this document, or it has been read to you.
- Your questions about this research study have been answered.
- You have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury.
- You have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights.
- You are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it.
- You voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled The use of social media as a conduit to promote social justice in the Deaf Community, as a cultural and linguistic minority, through the visual language of American Sign Language: A movement against Audism.

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Participant’s Name: ___________________________ Date: ________________
(please print)

Person Obtaining Consent: ___________________________ Date: ________________
(if applicable)