PART THREE:
SUBCOMMUNITIES

The Education of the Deaf:
A Sub-Community in the Making
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Research on the deaf is increasing in popularity. Linguistics, education and the social sciences have each contributed to recent studies. Still, there is a great deal of research needed on the life habits and communication processes of the deaf.

In the two years that I have been associated with deaf people, I have seen that their unique needs and problems have set them apart from the mainstream of American society. Deaf people are joined together by a common condition but, more importantly, by a common visual orientation and a particular mode of communication. This bond has led to the formation of a distinct sub-culture.

In this paper, I will discuss the separateness of the deaf community and demonstrate that its boundaries are defined by the language used in communication. I chose to study its educational systems and institutions to discover how these often integrate the deaf child into the deaf community. With this focus, I conducted my fieldwork at the California School for the Deaf (CSD) in Berkeley in Spring, 1976.

Communication
Before discussing the structure, teaching (socialization) methods and members of the school I will describe the various modes of communication currently used by the deaf themselves and with the hearing world. Most deaf people are fluent in two or more. Which is used in a particular situation depends on the context as well as whether one is addressing a deaf or hearing person.

Ameslan, an acronym of American Sign Language, has been described as "real deaf sign language" or as the " 'deaf' deaf sign language," because it is the most commonly used medium of communication among the deaf. It does not follow the English grammatical scheme or use English vocabulary. Ameslan is more closely affiliated to the Chinese language. As in Chinese, each character in Ameslan is iconic. Its root form can come to represent a number of complex conceptual ideas depending upon the placement of a gesture. Presently little research has been completed on the structure of Ameslan grammar, but it has been suggested that the grammatical and syntactical ordering is also similar to that of the Chinese language.

Because it relies on other-than-English vocabulary and structure, and because it is a visual rather than an auditory mode, Ameslan has proved to be less efficient in communicating with the hearing community. Hence, other communication systems were developed which have come to be used for the hearing and deaf populations.

Siglish, for example, is an acronym of "Signed English" and is an attempt to blend English and Ameslan. It uses Ameslan vocabulary, English syntax and was developed in an effort to teach English to deaf children.

A third option, SEE, is a relatively recent innovation in sign language. The initials stand for "Signing Exact English." SEE attempts to illustrate English visually on the hands. Some Ameslan vocabulary is included but it follows English syntax exactly. Only those people who are fluent in English use this system effectively. Because English is a second language for the deaf, this system has not been widely accepted to date. It is suspected that a better understanding of the English language will provide greater ease with SEE and, in the long run, greater chances of achievement within the hearing community. Current research is investigating the educational value of SEE sign, with an interest in its overall long-term communication benefits.

The condition of deafness places emphasis on vision and visual communication. Ameslan, Siglish and SEE sign are all visual languages. Ameslan, ideographic and, at times, iconic, is an efficient communication method used primarily when interacting within the deaf community. SEE sign is English expressed visually on the hands. Siglish is a blend of Ameslan and SEE. Both SEE and Siglish are popular because of their strong relationship to English. Because the deaf community must integrate, to a certain extent, with the hearing, English-speaking community, the latter two are often emphasized in deaf educational settings. Still other methods of communication are needed when interacting with the hearing community whose communication system is principally auditory.

Oral communication, the process of speaking and lip-reading, is often required from a deaf person when dealing with the hearing population. Many deaf people have, therefore, developed intelligible speech. Those people who lost their hearing at least several years after birth tend to have less problems acquiring this faculty. Though it is possible for those who have never heard to acquire speech, for them, the learning process is more complicated. Because the production of sounds is so interconnected with the capacity to

hear, deaf people who learn to speak often retain a "deaf accent." Still others are unable to acquire speech due to physiological reasons.

Lip reading or speech reading are synonymous terms which mean the ability to understand what a speaker says by watching his or her mouth. Most hearing people rely (often unconsciously) on lip reading as a communication device. It is also practiced by most deaf people, although, on the average, only about 20-30% of a conversation can be grasped.

A fifth mode of expression, paper and pencil writing, is used by all deaf people to communicate, primarily with the hearing world. Of all eleven students who completed the questionnaire, eight use paper and pencil when interacting with the hearing community.

Even given the number of possible methods of communication, there are cases where a deaf child is not permitted to learn a language or have an education. Parents of these children equate the inability to hear with an inability to think. Fortunately, these cases are few, but they reflect a bias that hearing people often have which assumes that deafness is associated with lesser intelligence. This bias complicates the communication process in situations of interaction between the deaf and the non-deaf no matter what methods of expression are used.

There is a great deal of controversy as to which mode of communication should be taught to youngsters, whether one should be an exclusive choice and, if not, which should be taught at what age. The first great controversy is between oralism and manual communication. Advocates of oralism (which includes lip reading and oral communication) usually forbid the use of sign language. The manual method provides the child with a visual language. Ameslan and Siglish have been the preferred dialects. Most educators favor the useage of Siglish in the classroom, whereas Ameslan is commonly learned outside the classroom: in the dormitories or at home where the majority of family members are deaf.

This selection of methods, oralism versus manual communication, defines contingencies within the deaf community. Primarily because oralists tend to reject sign language, two camps develop. The "manualists" are more flexible and usually use oralism methods in combination with their sign system. Speech and speech reading are used primarily when communicating with the hearing population, but often carry over into intra-community communication. Ameslan is almost never effectively utilized by the hearing community so that it is rarely used outside of the deaf community.

The Deaf in the Hearing World

My study at CSD has led me to believe that the deaf population is a unique sub-community in American culture which is formed primarily in response to communication barriers.

American culture is one requiring the ability to hear. Its habits, institutions and markers cater to the hearing population. Deaf people can function in the hearing world and few formal restrictions bar the deaf from gaining employment, joining clubs, enjoying entertainment, etc. But in order to do these, they must accommodate themselves to practices and procedures geared for the hearing. Because of the demands, few deaf people do.

In addition to the practical difficulties of functioning in a hearing world, the deaf population must contend with others' attitudes and assumptions regarding deafness. Most hearing people do not comprehend the condition of deafness and often treat deaf people as inferior to themselves. The hearing population feel they cannot understand or are not understood by deaf people. These situations make it uncomfortable for hearing people to include deaf people among their social friends or business acquaintances.

The deaf population is indeed a sub-group in American culture with group membership defined by a common condition. Their lack of hearing capacity led to the emphasis on and development of visual communication. Because they rely on a unique language, the deaf are forced to organize separate institutions and variant patterns of activity.

I believe that the reason the deaf population is a sub-community in American culture is not so much because of their deafness, per se. It is a result of their mode of communication. Their visual orientation and resulting visual mode of communication are instrumental in forming their smaller community within the larger, hearing, American society. Overall, their language barrier isolates them from American culture. CSD, as an agent of socialization, provided a good opportunity to investigate the group-defining process.

California School for the Deaf

CSD was established to give the best possible well-rounded education to its students. Classes are small and geared toward preparation for college entrance. In addition, emphasis is placed on acquisition of a usable trade skill for those students of average or less-than-average academic ability. The staff hopes that they are equipping the students with skills that will facilitate their integration into the mainstream of American society. To a certain extent this occurs, but due to the boarding-school nature of CSD, students form a common foundation with their deaf school friends that will be important to them throughout their lives and on which they will tend to rely for vital support and camaraderie.

At CSD, 363 students were enrolled during the time of this study (May 1976). There were 70 elementary students, 66 junior high school students, 34 multiply-handicapped students in the special unit and 193 high school students.

CSD employed 28 deaf teachers and 48 hearing

teachers to handle these elementary through high school age students. In the small classes of about ten students, the deaf teachers especially come to be positive role models for the maturing students.

The students at CSD are joined together by a common condition: deafness. Those who are hard of hearing are normally considered ineligible for admittance to CSD, but there are exceptions (Students nos. 4, 5, 7, 11, and 12, for example). The students' education is different from that of their hearing peers because of its emphasis on the acquisition of particular communication skills. The philosophy of CSD as found in *The California Schools for the Deaf, Berkeley, Riverside* (March 1968) states the following:

> The techniques employed in the education of deaf children differ from those used in the education of hearing children, even though we have the same objectives. The fundamental problem facing our schools is the necessity for developing means of communication in children who are without normal oral and written skills in communication because of their hearing impairment. The problem of teaching deaf children is complicated because deaf children, generally, do not have normal communication skills...

Methodology

My primary research method was the use of questionnaires. This seemed the most efficient tool for accumulating large amounts of data within a limited time. The questionnaires were completed anonymously. This method was used in the hopes that it would facilitate a willingness to divulge personal information that might be embarrassing to discuss in a face-to-face interview. I administered the first questionnaire to eleven CSD students. All were high school seniors at the time (Spring 1976). The Dean of Students selected them according to their representativeness of the school population. There were eight females and seven males, but only four males chose to participate. Six of these students had hearing parents, five had deaf parents, and one did not indicate which.

The students were also classified by their degree of deafness: hard of hearing, moderately deaf or profoundly deaf. "Hard of hearing" pertains to those students who have some degree of distinctive hearing with or without a hearing aid. "Moderately deaf" indicates those who hear noise but cannot distinguish sounds. The "profoundly deaf" have no hearing whatsoever. Each category was represented by two to four students. I tried to balance the various degrees of deafness between those with hearing parents and those with deaf parents.

I was mainly concerned with the impact of the family on education, language and future goals. Many of the questions probe this aspect. The results and significance of the responses of these two groups will be presented and compared later in this paper.

The questions in the second questionnaire focused on personal beliefs, values and attitudes. I was particularly interested in how the condition of deafness affected adjustment, self-image and ambitions. I was also interested in the acquisition of language proficiency — particularly in English. I wanted to see what sort of problems the students encounter when, for example, translating from Ameslan to English when communicating with the hearing population.

Some problems arose through the use of questionnaires generally. I tried to word the questions so that the intent could be easily understood and I tried to include a wide range of questions to cover aspects necessary to give a good foundation for research interpretation. But this proved to be a less than satisfactory approach since several of the students did not feel comfortable communicating in their second language. With some exceptions, deaf people are rarely at ease with or competent at written English expression. It was later suggested to me that a "none," or "nothing" response (which occurred frequently) is often a tactic used to avoid embarrassment from this lack of skill.

Interviews

Interviewing was the most enjoyable method for me. I could gather information unique to the individual's experience. Twelve deaf students and five teachers were interviewed. Due to the students' busy schedules and the time limitations of the study, I found it necessary to ask a friend to help me interview half of the students. Mark Dey is an accomplished signer and was an asset to the study. All of the students were interviewed using Siglish. Thus the language barriers found in the questionnaire and survey diminished. Most of the students felt quite comfortable in the interview situation, and all were willing to divulge more information than I asked for, or anticipated.

The first four interviews were conducted individually and privately. Due to circumstances, the other eight interviews were conducted in a room with other deaf students. Because Sign Language is a visual language, it is difficult to hold a private conversation. Fortunately, this did not seem to be too disturbing to the students, perhaps because of the boarding school nature of CSD and student closeness.

Of the twelve deaf students interviewed, four also filled out both questionnaires. I asked them to give me their questionnaire numbers so that the information obtained in the interviews might be compared with that from the questionnaires.

I also interviewed five teachers. Four were female and one was male. I did not ask their ages, but they appeared to range from about 30 to 50 years old.

I was mainly interested in whether the students and teachers perceived the deaf population as a sub-community. If so, I was interested in their opinions as to what were the factors in the formation and continuance of the sub-group. The results will be presented in the next section.

The biggest problem with this method was the li-

mited time. It would have been advantageous to live among the people studied.

The Family, Self-Image and Language Acquisition

A key factor in the development of a deaf child is her parents' reaction to her deafness. It makes a considerable difference if a child is born to deaf parents or hearing parents. Though reactions vary greatly, deaf parents tend to accept their offspring more than hearing parents. A deaf parent's negative reaction to the child's deafness is usually due either to the parent's projection of her feelings of self-rejection onto her offspring or to an oralist parent's rejection of her child's choice to use manual communication. These cases are rare. For the most part, deaf parents empathize with their deaf offspring and tend to function as positive role models for them.

In contrast to the supportiveness of deaf parents is the negative reaction of hearing parents to the deaf child. Six students' interviews were in the deaf child/ hearing parent category: four had lost their hearing after birth and two were born deaf. Two of the six students had parents who they felt rejected their deafness completely. This is especially characteristic of hearing parents whose child became deaf after birth and who find it hard to accept that their child will never hear again. Whereas their child was once normal, they can only perceive the severe limitations of the child's condition. They fear that a deaf person can never function in society.

Hearing parents who do not accept their child's deafness often do everything they can to make their child appear normal. Though they have low expectations, they insist on the child conforming to the behavior of a hearing child. She is taught how to speech read, speak (if possible) and is discouraged from using sign language. These hearing parents usually send their deaf children to a hearing school were they can interact with "normal" hearing people.

Though the aim of this sort of training is to prevent the child from becoming a social outcast, this is, in fact, often promoted by trying to make the child "hear." She begins to feel that something is "wrong" with her. She is taught that the deaf world is not desirable and yet, she has trouble relating to the hearing world. She begins to feel like an outcast of both worlds: a loner, rejected and misunderstood. Sensing her extreme limitations, she tends to lower her ambitions.

Student #7 is an example of this syndrome. He became hard of hearing at the age of three. The cause is unknown. When asked if his parents accept his deafness he answered, "No." Questionnaire #2, question two probed: "If you could be anything you wanted to be, what would you be like? If you were perfect?" "Hearing," was his reply. [Hereafter I will indicate questionnaire and question number such that questionnaire #2, question 2 would be denoted #2(2).]

His parents sent him to a hearing elementary school which was attended by approximately eight other deaf students. When he is at home, he never uses sign language but tries to conform to his parents' desires by using speech reading and the English language as much as possible. He uses Siglish at most other times and is interested in learning SEE sign which follows the English syntax exactly. This emphasis on acquiring English skills is based on the theory that if a deaf person has a good command of the English language, opportunities for success within the hearing society will be enhanced. The student's sense of incompleteness undoubtedly stems from his parental rejection. He is using the acquisition of English skills in a compensatory manner. Unfortunately his feelings of inadequacy are bound to be compounded by his problems with written English skills. His difficulties are apparent in his response to the question: "What do you like to do alone or with a group?" — "I like to over house or my house. We visits everything people." Despite his formal training in the language, he has little grasp of English syntax and construction.

Student #6's answers provide other examples of the impact of parental reaction. She also feels that her parents reject her deafness. When asked if she prefers group- or individual-oriented activities, she chose solitary ones. In response to another question, she expressed a desire to return to her childhood.

As we have seen, children of hearing parents who cannot accept their child's deafness tend to be increasingly dissatisfied with themselves. They see themselves as being different, incomplete and deformed, and this self-image adversely influences every facet of their lives. It affects their educational experiences, social interaction, future family, employment expectations and so forth.

In contrast to students #6 and 7, student #13 was born deaf and says his hearing parents accept his deafness. They apparently did not try to make him a hearing child but sent him at an early age to a deaf elementary school. His first mode of communication at home was oral. Now he uses sign language at home and, at most other times Ameslan, which he learned in school. The answer to the question: "If you were perfect what would you be like?" was "If I could be anything I wanted to be I race the car." He stated a potentially-attainable ambition rather than a negative aspect of his personality as the other two had and he did not refer to deafness as an imperfection. To the question: "What does it mean to fall in love?" he replied, "I never fall in love but girls will fall in love with me." His answers indicate a very positive self-image. He apparently perceives himself to be a normal, healthy and attractive individual.

Those parents who accept their child's deafness help him gain a positive self-image. Their support and encouragement add to the chance of having a healthy normal maturation process. Student #13's grasp of

English and ease with a variety of communication methods undoubtly reflects his parents' acceptance of his deafness.

When a baby is announced in the delivery room as healthy, the dreams parents envision for their child become real possibilities. When their child is born deaf or loses her hearing after birth, their expectations become confused and are often shattered. It has been found to be somewhat easier for parents to adjust to their child's condition if they are told in the delivery room. It is particularly difficult for parents to achieve a positive attitude when their child becomes deaf sometime after birth.

Only two out of the five students with deaf parents lost the capacity to hear after birth. Student #11 became hard of hearing by tonsillitis at the age of two. She went to a hearing elementary school that had a special program for the deaf. (Most schools for the deaf, like CSD, usually do not accept hard of hearing students). She has good speech and can speech read well. Even though student #11 is proficent in communication skills used by hearing people, she sometimes lacks confidence and will rely on "expected" modes of communication and aids (ie, those anticipated by hearing people). For example, she uses an interpreter for important situations, such as a trial, and will sometimes use paper and pencil in the presence of hearing people.

A hard-of-hearing person can usually function effectively in either world: hearing or deaf. Because this student is from deaf parents, the deaf world and a language of the deaf probably feel most comfortable to her. She revealed her over-all positive self-image when answering #2(3): "Is there any student here at CSD that you wish you were like?" "No. I'm perfectly satisfied with myself." Her ambitions are high. She plans to attend Gallaudet College and become a teacher of the deaf or a psychiatrist.

Another student who revealed a positive self-image is student #12, who was also hard-of-hearing from birth. According to him, it was caused by family heredity. His preferred language is Ameslan, but he uses speech and speech reading with hearing people. He hopes to become well-known or famous and enjoys social interaction, saying: "I like to be alone when I tired or watching TV but most of the time I like to be involved in groups."

Both of these students of deaf parents seem to be content with themselves. As one CSD teacher said, "Deaf kids with deaf parents are better adjusted. They have never felt different." These students seem to live relatively contented lives. They do not perceive themselves as being different and are, therefore, more confident and ambitious.

The Acquisition of Communication Skills

Though the attitude of deaf children of deaf pa-

rents and empathetic hearing parents is similarly positive, parental influence on these two groups differs in an important way: the age at which children acquire communication skills.

A teacher at CSD discusses the deaf child/deaf parent relationship:

> I have definitely found differences with kids of deaf parents vs. kids of hearing parents. Students of deaf parents seem to be much more advanced in a lot of ways. They have more language, more understanding of what goes on around them. They are more like hearing people, more like their peers, because their parents talk about more things with them. They can communicate without any effort. Deaf kids with deaf parents are better adjusted. They have never felt different.

Another teacher also discussed the difference in communication training during pre-school years:

> First of all, in language there are definite limitations. They (children of hearing parents) start out a couple of years behind. An average hearing child goes to nursery school at age four and has a huge vocabulary. A deaf child, if he doesn't have deaf parents or if he doesn't have parents who have given him some sort of language, he starts out hundreds of words behind in their language development. That means that a lot of subject matter goes right by them.

CSD compensates for this by using the Total Communication method. Instruction is geared to the individual student's needs. Whichever system will enable maximal comprehension will be used: gestures, fingerspelling, speech, lip reading, Ameslan, Siglish and so on. Signing combined with speech is the end thrust of Total Communication. A slogan on a school poster reinforces this idea:

IF YOU SAY IT — SIGN IT; IF YOU SIGN IT — SAY IT

Underlying the Total Communication method, is the realization that it is difficult to teach a person a language based on sound (especially one as complex as English) when they cannot associate sound with meaning. It is often easier to allow the student to learn another type of language. Later, English might be taught as it is to foreign students here in the United States — as a second language.

Student #15 provided reinforcement for this method. She attended a hearing school prior to enrolling in CSD. For six to eight years she was instructed in English using English. She said she never understood what the teachers were talking about until she came to CSD where she was allowed to learn Ameslan first. When she was taught English by using Ameslan she finally understood what her former teachers were doing.

The following is a comparison betwen children of deaf parents who were taught a usable language from birth (students #8, #11, and #14) and children of hearing parents who were without a language until they entered school (students #4, #5, and #7). On Question 11, "What do you plan to do when you

graduate (marriage, school, job, etc.)?" their responses were:

Deaf student/hearing parents:
#4: "I probably plan to go college in Fresno or New York."
#5: "Job or college."
#7: "I job to army I did reason marriage?"

Deaf student/deaf parents:
#11: "I plan to attend Gallaudet College this coming fall."
#14: "I plan to go to Gallaudet College to earn my B.A. degree, then to any hearing college to earn my M.A. degree, before getting a job as either a teacher of the deaf or a psychiatrist."
#8: "I will go to N.T.I.D. in New York to be an artist or engineer."

These examples indicate that those students who were given a usable language from birth have gone on to master a second language . The other students are having problems with written skills in their first language. As mentioned earlier, a deaf person will write "No" or Nothing" when asked to complete information in English simply to avoid revealing problems with written English. Student #5 responded intermittently throughout her questionnaires with: "Nothing, nobody." Several other students also used this type of answer frequently. The examples cited above support one theory of factors which affect language acquisition among deaf children. The sample was far too small, however, to provide confirmation.

Conclusion

By now, all the students in this paper have graduated. Some of them will continue their education at colleges which either provide services for deaf students or at colleges specifically for the deaf. Other students will begin work.

Those deaf students without a good command of written and spoken English will have difficulty interacting effectively in the hearing world. They will probably become overwhelmed by legal forms, traffic regulations, employment applications and similar written documents. In order to meet the demands and pressures, they often form closely-knit social networks which act as reinforcements. They welcome opportunities to join clubs exclusively for the deaf where they can share experiences, discuss strategies and generally relax with people with whom they can communicate easily. Thus, the language barrier that isolates them from the hearing community binds them together into a separate sub-community.

Even those students who have mastered English must deal with hearing people's attitudes and assumptions about them. Deaf persons must also contend with structural problems in a work world geared to the ability to hear: they cannot answer phones, make speeches without an interpreter's aid or entertain the big client who has stereotypic preconceptions about deaf people. Excluded from most advantageous situations and jobs in the hearing world, deaf people, however, are able to fill leadership or executive positions within the deaf community. In these positions they are often an effective link with the hearing community because they can function relatively efficiently in both worlds.

We have seen that deaf people are different from their hearing peers because of their mode of communication and that this has forced them to organize as a sub-community. They gain membership because they are deaf and are first introduced to this sub-community through their deaf parents (10%) or through the alienation they may have experienced in the nuclear hearing family (90%). (Approximately 90% of the deaf population were born into hearing families, but they all did not experience alienation.) Those who attend an educational institution such as CSD continue to strengthen the bonds of group membership. By the time they graduate, they have learned a common language, defined an internal hierarchy in a relatively exclusive sub-community, and laid a foundation of similar attitudes and patterns of behavior that will mold them throughout their lives.