



# **Deaf Culture**

## **A subcultural approach to Deaf Communities in America and Germany Magisterarbeit**

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„Es ist nicht so wichtig, einen Platz in der Gesellschaft zu finden, als die Gesellschaft so zu gestalten, dass man in ihr auch einen Platz finden möchte.“<sup>1</sup>

Marion Savio 1964 in Berkley

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<sup>1</sup>It is not that important to find a place in society rather than to form the society so that one wants to find a place in it.

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## Abbreviations

AAAD	American Athletic Association of the Deaf
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
Add.	Added
ASL	American Sign Language
ca.	circa, about, approximately
cf.	confer, compare
CI	Chochlear Implant
CODAs	Children of Deaf Adults
DGS	Deutsche Gebärdensprache (Geman Sign Language)
DPN	Deaf President Now
e.g.	exempli gratia, for example
et al.	et alii, and others
etc.	et cetera, and the rest
ff	and following
Fig.	Figure
FSL	French Sign Language
GEDPD	Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness
kugg	Verein für die Kultur und Geschichte Gehörloser
i.e.	id est, that is
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NAD	National Association of the Deaf
NFSD	National Fraternal Society of the Deaf
NS	National Socialism
p(p).	page(s)
SD	South Dakota
SEE	signing exact english
transl.	translation
UNO	United Nations Organisation
UP	University Press
U.S.	United States
WW	World War

# 1 Introduction

This thesis will show that Deaf communities are subcultures, and how this understanding of Deaf people may contribute to our broader concepts of culture and identity. To do this, I will consider the major features that demonstrate Deaf culture as distinct from other cultures, and from the status as merely a minority or a disability group. I will show how a new theoretical understanding of Deafness expands our traditional view of "culture", and ways that including "Deaf" experiences may enhance academic approaches to such fundamental concepts as "identity" and "community". The label "subculture" was carefully considered for this project, although with some trepidation.

The term subculture has been used extensively during the 1960s and the 1970s but seldom in the connection with disabled, or in particular, Deaf people. If one looks into the literature about subculture there can be found many groups labelled as subcultures: youth, homosexuals, the Labour movement, some styles like Hip Hop or political groups like the Provos, the Hippies or the Jusos. The definition of what a subculture is seems to depend on the time in history. Therefore the meaning of "subculture" is very complex. Many different words have been used to describe a similar phenomenon. Some of the used terms are: fringe group, counterculture, minority group or ethnic minority. Differences generally depend on the author or viewer, the focus on the part of the culture that is described or examined, and the temporal and cultural context when a certain group is observed. Seldomly, authors recognize a difference between social groups that choose to be different compared to groups that are different because of their physical status or their ancestry.

## **Purpose of the paper and starting position**

Deaf culture is not mentioned very often in academic fields in Germany and only relatively recently in the U.S.

The Deaf themselves or academics within the field of Deaf studies might use the term subculture, but academics from other fields have not yet realized Deaf people as a subculture. But, if the Deaf are a subculture they should be included in broader academic fields. This thesis will show that Deaf are a subculture and it will demonstrate some of the implications this recognition produces for scholars. Society, geographically for this paper, means the Occident, mainly America and Germany. The paper will primarily be based on theoretical subcultural approaches by Albert Cohen and Rolf Schwendter. Another goal is to show why it is important to include Deaf Communities into academic fields other than Deaf Studies. The research has been done mostly in the United States and focuses extensively on America's Deaf Community because they have more available resources for study and an especially vibrant and distinctive Deaf cultural community.

## **Approach to the topic**

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter will introduce the topic and outline some of the major issues involved. It will provide important facts about present research in Germany and the United States, the two countries this paper examines.

In chapter 2 important definitions for this topic will be discussed. It will start with the discussion of the terms "culture" and "subculture" and will then address concepts of "disability", the different meanings of "deaf", "hard of hearing", and "Deaf". "Sign language" and "minority" are central ideas that will be considered as well.

Chapter 3 will set the theoretical frame work. It will provide the basis of the subcultural approach. It also outlines the importance of a theory as an abstract tool, which can be adapted to different subcultural groups and their function.

Chapter 4 focuses on Identity. This is the crux of both Cultural Studies and Deaf culture. Through comparison with other historical incidences I will show and distinguish factors in Deaf cultural identity.

Chapter 5 will examine data collected from a survey, created for this thesis.<sup>2</sup> More than sixty deaf people from Germany, via an online questionnaire on the website <http://www.taubenschlag.de>, were asked about their (D)deafness. Respondents address what Deafness means for their life, especially concerning the issue identity. The survey also asks about identifying labels such as subculture, linguistic minority or disability community.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, will summarize the main facts and possible options of including the interpretation of Deaf Communities as subcultures into broader academic fields. It will examine how that can enhance our understanding of culture, subculture and identity.

The appendix includes the original version of the questionnaire that was available online in Germany and its English counterpart. The questionnaires that have been returned to me by the participants and were part of the evaluation, a tabular with evaluated data, as well as the Power Point slides from the presentation on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 at Gallaudet University, and its outline, can be found on a CD at the end of this paper.

## **1.1 Subject of the paper**

Through this thesis I want to prove that the Deaf community can rightfully be called a subculture. Using various theoretical models, I assess distinguishing aspects of the Deaf Community, including how members view and describe themselves. I then suggest ways that the inclusion of Deaf Studies into different academic fields enhances and complicates mainstream notions of culture, subculture, and identity.

There have been many different approaches towards culture and new definitions

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<sup>2</sup>The questionnaire can be found in the appendix and also on CD.

throughout time, but none seems able to fathom the real problem of giving a definition that is accepted by a majority. Too many subjective understandings of what a culture is exist. A subcultural approach might be able to clarify this in some ways. When it comes to minority groups we need to take a deeper look under the surface. As anthropologists have shown, to be able to understand a group that distinguishes itself from the mainstream, it is helpful to interact with those groups. It is important to point out, that the use of the term "subculture" in this work is meant not in a hierarchical order. Deaf Communities can be called a subculture because it gathers underneath a mainstream majority label, but next to other subcultures.<sup>3</sup> There can be found more subcultures within one subculture (e.g. there are Deaf gays, Deaf Christians, Deaf Jews, Deaf fans of a certain sport etc.).

Through this paper I want to introduce aspects of the American and German Deaf communities and show what they have in common with other subcultural groups. I do not lay claim to give very deep insight into the Deaf culture itself since this paper has been written from a Cultural Studies approach and not a Deaf Studies approach. A Cultural Studies approach, as for the department of Cultural Studies at the University of Leipzig means to mainly analyze culture of modern society beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century until the present. Through an interdisciplinary structure including cultural philosophy, cultural history and cultural sociology, cultural studies illuminates certain criteria, structures and progressions of modern cultures from different perspectives. Cultural Studies also analyzes the development and evolution of symbolical meanings of societies to better understand and explain today's world.

Deaf Studies, which is recognized as a field of study for only twenty years now, has much in common with Cultural Studies; both draw together different disciplines, but Deaf Studies "adds a unique visual spatial component through a language and culture which we are only beginning to understand".<sup>4</sup> Deaf Studies is a field of study which includes the history, sociology, and language of Deaf people. A definition, by Carty, Clarke, Hocking and Jackson, from 1994 describes Deaf Studies as follows:

Deaf Studies approaches the lives of Deaf people the way Women's Studies or Aboriginal Studies might approach the lives of these groups. Deaf Studies seeks to understand the particular experience and world view of Deaf people, and to explore the lives they lead and the ways they give meaning to things. Deaf Studies does this by looking at the history of Deaf people, the language they have created and the way in which this reflects their experience and traditions, the cultural norms and values which have developed through their community, and networks and organisations they have

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<sup>3</sup>Subcultures develop in response to the larger society, or are surrounded in various ways by the large/dominant society. A more accurate term might be "co-culture", but since the theoretical frame of subcultures will be used in this paper it seemed more appropriate to use the term subculture to proof deaf as a cultural group.

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.bris.ac.uk/deaf/library/deafstudies\\_info](http://www.bris.ac.uk/deaf/library/deafstudies_info) (16. February 2006).

structured and which provide ways of meeting and communicating.<sup>5</sup>

The focus in the field of Deaf Studies is on the culture, language and community of Deaf people. It is important to mention that it does not involve mainly hearing people who study Deaf people. Rather, Deaf Studies promotes a study "by Deaf people, with Deaf people, for the benefit of Deaf people and for the expansion of knowledge within the community as a whole. It draws on techniques and disciplines which have evolved in the hearing world but seeks to apply a Deaf perspective and new Deaf professionalism to the study".<sup>6</sup>

Since the author of this paper is hearing and not an active member of the Deaf world, this paper cannot offer certain first-hand perspectives or insights. Still, as a student of Cultural Studies I can present important features of Deaf culture that may be valuable to other scholars, and perhaps even to members of the Deaf world.

This work will be mainly based on the theory of subcultures by Rolf Schwendter (1973). His goal is to give a helpful approach of the meaning of subcultures and their different relations with the dominant culture. He also explains the functions and reasons for subcultures. He points out that parts of the society vary from the dominant culture and therefore gather in subcultures. If those subcultures are progressive, they can influence the dominant culture which can lead to changes in the society. According to Schwendter, the dominant culture in modern society misuses subcultures to stabilize their own culture, including certain norms and institutions. Schwendter also highlights that subcultures are necessary for a functioning democracy due to opposite views and new ways of social relations.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 Present research

In previous subcultural discussions Deaf people have rarely if ever been included. When reading different literature concerning Deaf culture, the term subculture is equally mentioned along with "minority group", "deaf society", "Deaf" or "disabled group". Distinctions are rarely made. The reason for that might be that mainstream society never saw the Deaf as a distinct group even though the Deaf saw themselves as one for over a century. Another factor may be that most hearing people who dealt with the deaf were "specialists": teachers, doctors or vocational rehabilitation advisors. Only within the last twenty years scholars have started to focus on Deaf culture rather than merely medical studies of deaf people.

Although the term "subculture" is difficult to locate in conjunction with "Deaf", scholars clearly recognize that the Deaf people share a cultural identity. For instance, Gallaudet

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<sup>5</sup><http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/learning/students/disabilities/resources/information/hi/ishi-int.html> (16. February 2006).

<sup>6</sup>[http://www.bris.ac.uk/deaf/library/deafstudies\\_info](http://www.bris.ac.uk/deaf/library/deafstudies_info) (16. February 2006).

<sup>7</sup>See: Rolf Schwendter, *Theorie der Subkulturen*, (Köln: Kippenheuter & Witsch, 1973).

University's Library boasts over eight hundred works that address "Deaf Culture".<sup>8</sup>

The issue of subcultures and their function had played a big role in the 1960s, influenced by the history and politics of that time. Among others, Cohen and Schwendter developed a theoretical basis with their works A general theory of subcultures<sup>9</sup> and Theorie der Subkulturen<sup>10</sup>. In these works, they introduced theories of subculture to academic fields which have been applied in the fields of Sociology, Gender Studies, Social Studies, Political Sciences, as well as History and Philosophy. However, in succeeding decades the term subculture almost vanished from the academic vernacular, but is now showing up in academic discussions again.<sup>11</sup> Why is the term subculture coming back into the discussion? One reason might be that all other existing or common terms do not work to really explain or express what is meant when talking about a group that does not match the dominant culture in all areas.

### 1.2.1 Source material in Germany

The source material in Germany, in both general Subcultural Studies and Deaf Studies, is not very comprehensive. There are a few works about subcultures which mostly focus on other groups (political, style, youth). One interesting work is: Die Subkultur des Gefängnisses (1967) that focuses on people who are in prison and their life as prisoners.<sup>12</sup> Another interesting work is Schwendter's: Theorie der Subkulturen from 1973 where Schwendter introduces a theory of subcultures and certain categories to make his theory applicable to different cultural groups. Those categories will also be used in this work to show that Deaf people are a subculture.

Most information about Deaf people in Germany focuses on educating children at schools for mentally or physically handicapped. It seems that one reason for this is that, historically, Germany advocated the oral method (which later was even named "the German method"). This basically meant that schools for the deaf emphasized voicing and lip-reading instead of signed communication. Due to oral principles, signing or finger spelling was forbidden in schools with the goal to mainstream deaf children. Oralists were hoping that Deaf culture would not develop any further. Oralists claimed that their method was a successful educational technique. However, considerable time was spent on the technical improvement of speaking and lip-reading rather than on academic subjects. Oralism's goal to "normalize" deaf people directly conflicted with the cultural notion of Deafness. This might help to

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<sup>8</sup>The same collection shows six works that address links between Deaf people and concepts of subculture.

<sup>9</sup>Albert K. Cohen, A general theory of subcultures (1955). In: Ken Gelder, and Sarah Thornton, The subcultures reader (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>10</sup>Transl. by author: 'theory of subcultures'

<sup>11</sup>See Chris Jenks, Subculture: The fragmentation of the social (London: Sage Publications, 2005).

<sup>12</sup>Steffen Harbordt, Die Subkultur des Gefängnisses: Eine soziologische Studie zur Resozialisierung (Stuttgart; Enke, 1967). Transl. by author: The subculture of the prison.

explain why German academic scholars so far have not focused on Deaf culture.

Nowadays sign languages are accepted by most nations and the field of Deaf Studies in Germany is growing. Still, the growing process is rather slow. An exceptional advanced department of Deaf Studies is located at the University of Hamburg<sup>13</sup>, their collection boasts:

36.000 titles of academic literature and 4.800 abstracts. It focuses on modern sign language research. Beyond that, the bibliography records texts related to Deaf culture, sign language interpreting as well as education of the deaf. The bibliography does not only refer to monographic books and readers, but also to articles in readers and journals. Being an adequate medium in sign language research, videos as well as digital media are also recorded.<sup>14</sup>

Another very good source and library can be found at the Samuel-Heinicke-School in Leipzig, the first school for the deaf in Germany (1778). The library holds a comprehensive amount of literature on various topics such as: audiology, acoustic, genetics, history and hearing impaired pedagogic, as well as integration of hearing impaired, phonetics and other topics. Interestingly there cannot be found specific literature about Deaf culture. Next to the mentioned literature they provide fifty professional journals from the inland and from overseas and a few tapes of video material with films about Deafness.<sup>15</sup>

Also helpful has been the journal Das Zeichen which is published by the "Institut für Deutsche Gebärdensprache und Kommunikation"<sup>16</sup> in Hamburg and the "Gesellschaft für Gebärdensprache und Kommunikation Gehörloser e.V."<sup>17</sup>. It is released three times a year (until 2002 it was released quarterly). The publishers recognize it as a professional journal that reports on sign language and the Deaf community. Their focuses are the newest results of research and developments as well as occurrences in theory and practice. It gives a good insight into ongoing discussions concerning Deaf communities. It is addressed to hearing and deaf people.<sup>18</sup>

Also helpful has been the website <http://www.taubenschlag.de> which was created by and for Deaf people. Their goal is to access information for the Deaf. The website gives a good insight to many issues that could be interesting for the Deaf Community. It publishes international news about e.g. upcoming conferences, international events in Germany like Deaf sport competitions, parties or job opportunities for Deaf people. It has common categories which can be found on many websites like: press releases, notifications

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<sup>13</sup>See: <http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/>

<sup>14</sup>Find more information on their website: <http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/BibWeb/F-Description.html> (18. January 2006).

<sup>15</sup>Find more Information here: <http://www.samuel-heinicke-schule-leipzig.de/bibliothek/index.html>. Interesting to mention is, that this school was and still is supporting the oral method.

<sup>16</sup>Transl. by author: Department of German Sign Language and Communication

<sup>17</sup>Transl. by author: Association of sign language and communication of deaf people.

<sup>18</sup><http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/signum/zeichen/> (28. January 2006).

and commercials, columns about jokes, reviews of books or films and experience reports. Another category is communication, which informs about technical devices, translating and other communication issues. The category culture gives insight to films, journals, books, movies and theatre. Followed by science, where new publications or researches are announced; Sport, where one can find listings of sport organisations or clubs; learning, where education schools or driving schools are listed or just general other options like a chat room, online shopping or travelling. The data on this website gives some evidence that Deaf Germans are a rich subculture, with many different variations and interests.

### **1.2.2 Source material in the USA**

In many ways, the United States is much more advanced than other countries in the world. It also occupies a leading role when it comes to the field of Deaf Studies. Not without reason it is the US where the only liberal arts university, Gallaudet University, primarily serving the deaf, exists.<sup>19</sup> Historically this goes back to Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc, who wanted to educate deaf children. Therefore, in 1817, they established the first school for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. Throughout the time Deaf education more and more developed and in 1864 Gallaudet's youngest son, Edward Minor Gallaudet established the federally funded Gallaudet College, now Gallaudet University.

Gallaudet University is a vital repository for researching a topic concerning Deafness. It holds the largest library and archive on Deaf communities and deafness. The archive houses diverse materials, including: photographs of Deaf people, subject and biographical files, correspondence, films and videotapes by and about Deaf, artwork, rare publications, manuscripts, museum artefacts, Deaf periodicals, school reports, scrapbooks, and news clippings. As stated on the University's website:

Educators of deaf and hard of hearing students the world over, as well as individuals conducting research related to deaf people, their history, culture and language, regard Gallaudet as a valuable resource. The University's Library is home to one of the world's most extensive collections of works by and about deaf people; and the research conducted through the Gallaudet Research Institute is recognized and cited by scholars around the globe.<sup>20</sup>

Due to time constraints I was not able to visit any other schools or libraries in the US that might hold a good collection of material as well. The copious amount of data at the Gallaudet University however has provided ample information to address the issues studied in this paper.

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<sup>19</sup>For further information please see: <http://www.gallaudet.edu>

<sup>20</sup><http://www.gallaudet.edu/x182.xml> (15. October 2005).

## 2 Definitions and distinctions

As it is the case in almost all academic papers, I will use terms that might have a different meanings in different historic and contemporary contexts or to different people. This chapter will take a closer look at some of the terms that will be used in the following chapters. The chosen definitions should help to better understand what it means to be Deaf and also why a theory of subcultures can be helpful to support this minority group.

Because this paper closely examines concepts of culture and subculture, certain terms take on added meaning. As is common in Deaf Studies literature, "Deaf" with a capitalized "D" will be used when talking about the Deaf cultural community and "deaf" with a small "d" will be used when talking about the physical status of not being able to hear and the people who do not identify themselves as part of the Deaf community.

When talking about Deaf people in this paper, I am addressing people who are physically deaf or hard of hearing and identify with the Deaf Community. This "particular group of people share American Sign Language (ASL) as a primary means of communication, associate primarily with other Deaf people, often attend Deaf residential schools, join social and political clubs that promote Deaf cultural awareness, read Deaf-produced publications, share a common folklore, and often see themselves as separate from mainstream society".<sup>21</sup> Those Deaf people see being deaf as a cultural-linguistic experience and have realized that the Deaf Community can widen their horizon in a unique way and that they are not alone with many issues they are dealing with.

In the following chapter I will give definitions which play an important role in this paper. The definitions I will look at are: "Minority", "Culture", "Subculture", "Disability", "deaf", "hard of hearing", "Deaf" and "Sign Language".

### 2.1 Minority

A minority can be seen in a demographic group on a certain territory (state, region, or nation), that distinguishes itself somehow from the majority population. Distinguishing criteria can be language, race, religion, morals, social functions, lifestyle, sexual orientation etc. or it could be a numerical minority. Many times minorities are disadvantaged or have less power (whether political or economical). In America the non-white population used to be referred to as a minority. For ethnic or national minorities, meaning a population group that lives on the territory of a different state, the UNO and other international organizations have established special minority rights. Those rights have been established due to ongoing discrimination against minorities.

The New Encyclopedia Britannica defines a minority as follows:

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<sup>21</sup>Paul K. Longmore, and Lauri Umansky, eds. The New Disability History, American Perspectives (New York and London University Press, 2001), 232.

A culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group living within a larger society. When used to describe such a group, the term carries with it a web of political and social implications. As the term is used by politicians and social scientists, a minority is necessarily subordinate to the dominant group within a society. This subordinancy, rather than a numerical minority, is the chief defining characteristic of a minority group.<sup>22</sup>

But there have been more distinctions made. Social psychology distinguishes two types of minorities: a numerical or statistical minority, and a social minority. A social minority distinguishes itself from the rest of the society because of cultural or psychological criteria. The emergence or formation of a certain minority can influence the social identity of the individuals that belong to that minority.

There have been various attempts to categorize minorities. Some of them are the following: National minority, ethnic minority and language minority. National minorities are minorities that have their state majority in a different country than their own, e.g. the Danish in Germany. Ethnic minorities are minorities who do not have their own land as e.g. the Roma and Sinti. Language minorities are not an ethnic or national minority but they speak a different mother tongue than the population majority of the state they live in as do the francophone Swiss or Canadians.<sup>23</sup> This would also include the Deaf. Also true for minorities is, that they are mostly less in number compared to a dominant group.<sup>24</sup>

The line between a minority and a subculture seems to be not very clear. The main difference though is that a minority mainly is defined by numbers e.g. the number of short people in the U.S. compared to subcultures which primarily focus on cultural issues. As for the Deaf, they are both, a minority because only about 0,1% of the German and the U.S. population are deaf, but they are also a subculture because Deaf communities have various ways to express their history and a cultural foundation for their identity.

The focus on culture plays a very important role in the discussion of Deaf communities. Therefore the terms culture and subculture will be discussed in the following chapters.

## 2.2 What is culture anyway?

For a long time people have been trying to fathom the meaning of what culture or a subculture is. Nevertheless, it is agreed upon that a culture is a very complex concept that can be very

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<sup>22</sup>The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Fifteenth Edition, Volume 8, (Chicago and London, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 2005) 169-170.

<sup>23</sup>Cf.: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority> and <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minderheiten> (24. October 2005).

<sup>24</sup>For more information on minorities also see: G. Mugni: The Power of Minorities. Academic Press, London 1982; S. Moscovici: Toward a Theory of Conversation Behavior. In: L. Berkowitz (Hrsg.): Advances in experimental social psychology, Bd. 13. Academic Press, New York 1980; G. E. Simpson and J. M. Yinger: Racial and Cultural Minorities, New York 1958.

wide (including whole nations, civilizations, and religions) or very specific (e.g. family based traditions). A commonly used definition of culture is the one of Edward Tyler who defines it as followed:

Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, believe, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.<sup>25</sup>

This definition shows the complexity of the term culture and the different ways of meaning it can include. The sociologist Chris Jenks has published a four volume book entitled Culture.<sup>26</sup> In those volumes one can find many articles about a wide range of topics concerning culture, written by well known authors like Alfred Weber or Émile Durkheim.

In his introduction Jenks gives a 4-fold typology that offers a good view on the complexity of the concept of culture and also tries to capture a variety of meanings. With this typology he tries to "summarize some accounts of the genesis of the concept 'culture'.

1. Culture is a cerebral, or [...] a cognitive category. Culture becomes intelligible as a general state of mind. It carries with it the idea of perfection, a goal or an aspiration of individual human achievement or emancipation.
2. Culture as a more embodied and collective category. Culture invokes a state of intellectual or moral development in society.
3. Culture as a descriptive or concrete category. [...] Culture as the collective body of arts and intellectual work within any one society.
4. Culture as a social category. Culture regarded as the whole way of life of people."<sup>27</sup>

This typology also shows the complexity and the variety of meaning and definitions to describe a certain way of behavior or lifestyle. It ranges from the discussion of high and low culture (culture as the idea of perfection, a goal, intellectual development) to the cultural expression through arts (collective body of arts) and the national identity (social category, way of life of people). To narrow down the complexity of the term culture it is helpful to look at the definition of subcultures.

### **2.3 The definition of subculture**

Commonly, the term culture is conceived in relation to nations: American culture, German culture, African culture and so forth. But there are many variations within one country. That

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<sup>25</sup>Edward Burnett Tylor, *The Origins of Culture*, 2.ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 1.

<sup>26</sup>Chris Jenks, ed. *Culture: Critical concepts in Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. 8-9.

makes a more distinct term necessary which can be achieved by using the term "subculture". In his work The Subcultures Reader, Ken Gelder makes it clear, that "subordinate or marginal social groups had been accounted for in various ways long before this term gained currency".<sup>28</sup> This shows the need for a term that describes those subordinate and marginal social groups which can be accomplished by the term subculture.<sup>29</sup>

The word subculture is strongly defined by its prefix "sub". This comes from Latin and means "under", "below" or "less than".<sup>30</sup> This might cause misunderstandings towards subcultures as being lower cultures or cultures of less worth in comparison to the dominant culture. The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies makes a simple distinction by saying subcultures are communities while the majority group is the society.<sup>31</sup>

Schwendter sees the "degradation", meaning the prefix "sub" as being a "subdivision of the capitalistic culture, subcultures being part of the dominant culture, the governing classes".<sup>32</sup> The meaning of "sub" cannot be seen in a hierarchical order rather than in a variation, a different kind, which is under the head of a majority culture because it is a minority, looking at the number of people who are part of a group labeled a subculture.

The Harper Collins Dictionary puts it this way:

Any system of beliefs, values, and norms shared and actively participated in by an appreciable minority of people within a particular culture. The relationship of the subculture to the so-called dominant culture has been identified as one of subordination and relative powerlessness. [...] They [Subcultures] serve to provide a means of establishing both individual and group identity, and they are discernible largely through stylistic expression, particularly language, demeanor, music, dress, and dance. Subcultures, like culture generally, are the result of collective creativity and are therefore subject to historical change and transformation.<sup>33</sup>

This definition is noteworthy, because it does mention the term minority but also the structural hierarchal order as being dominated by another culture. Also important is to point out the function to create identity and binding elements, especially a particular language. It does not mention though what "particular" means. Perhaps this means slang or a dialect according to a social group formation such as Punks; it could mean the language of a

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<sup>28</sup>Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. The subcultures reader. (London and New York, 1997) 263.

<sup>29</sup>The main problem to define either of the above terms is that: "Cultures and subcultures are created, sustained, and changed in response to social dynamics within every society. They function as important general guidelines for behavior." In: Anderson, Yerker (1987): Culture and Subculture, 264. This means culture and subculture are important because they provide guidelines for behavior but their meanings change according to social dynamics.

<sup>30</sup>See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub> (14. October 2005).

<sup>31</sup>Rolf Schwendter, Theorie der Subkulturen (Köln: Kippenheuter & Witsch,1973) 24.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. 14.

<sup>33</sup>David Jary and Julia Jary, The Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology, (New York: Harper Collins Publications, 1991) 503-504.

certain profession, like doctors or lawyers, but it could also allude to Deaf people using sign language.

In his book Subculture (2005), Chris Jenks begins his work by suggesting that the former concept of a cultural variant is not that of a lower culture: "The dividing line between a 'culture' and 'subculture' or 'cultural variant' has not yet been firmly staked out." (Kluckhohn & Kelley 1962: p. 67)<sup>34</sup>

Jenks points out, that:

... the cumulative contemporary fascination with culture itself has a social history. [...] The study of culture need not be exclusive; it does not demand the abandonment of the concepts of society and social structure. The debate will range from suggestions of integration to recommendations of contest, but it will essentially revolve around the necessity of interface. The mediating concept selected to organize these sets of concerns is that of subculture.<sup>35</sup>

Jenks' goal therefore is to use the concept of subculture as a way to structure the complexity which is found in the term culture. That can include the function or a goal a counterculture carries by opposing the dominant culture. It includes also new trends in philosophy, literature, fashion, or other artistic expressions since those mostly start out from smaller groups and in the beginning stand in opposition to the mainstream. (For example Punk, New Wave in the 1980s, Techno, Gothic's, Gullah people, Creoles or the Amish). Concerning the Deaf community, it also helps to structure this group of people who can be found within one culture but who have specific goals or needs only concerning them. (This may include the fight of accepting sign language as an official language, including the provision of interpreters, also close captioning on television.)

In this paper the meaning of subculture does not intended a negative meaning. Rather, it is used to describe a variation of a very complex concept. Subcultures are, concerning their numbers, a minority group but they are more than that. They share certain values that lead to a strong bond and also to an identity. This is why the term subculture better describes the Deaf community rather than only using the term minority group. Through the cultural variant, a subculture establishes individual and also group identity. That means the Deaf community is both a minority group in terms of size, but they are also a subculture due to their claimed communal identity.

With this definition of subculture, it becomes apparent that Deaf communities exhibit characteristics that qualify as a subculture. Even though they could join sport clubs and play sports together with hearing people, they have established their own sport clubs and competitive events. They also have their own publications which emphasize Deaf events

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<sup>34</sup>Chris Jenks, Subculture: The fragmentation of the social (London: Sage Publications, 2005), Introduction.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. 4.

and issues specifically affecting their communities. Often these publications celebrate sign language, the intermarriage of Deaf people, and Deaf heritage.

## 2.4 Disability

Although scholars today recognize the social construction of Disability, most people still view Disability exclusively as a medical condition.<sup>36</sup> A social construction clarifies, that a disability is not only a biological or physiological experience but also a social experience. How someone experiences a certain situation also depends strongly on the social and historical context. As for the Deaf, their experiences a few decades ago, without the internet are vary different today, due to the new technology and the communication possibilities that it offers.

Many Deaf people oppose being labeled disabled. They see Disability as a stigmatized, medical concept. They thus reject it as a label for themselves. As authors Padden and Humphries explain:

'Disabled' is a label that historically has not belonged to Deaf people. It suggests political self-representations and goals unfamiliar to the group. When Deaf people discuss their deafness, they use terms deeply related to their language, their past, and their community. Their enduring concerns have been the preservation of their language, policies for educating deaf children, and maintenance of their social and political organizations. The modern language of 'access' and 'civil rights,' as unfamiliar as it is to Deaf people, has been used by Deaf leaders because the public understands these concerns more readily than ones specific to the Deaf community. Knowing well the special benefits, economic and otherwise, of calling themselves disabled, Deaf people have a history, albeit an uneasy one, of alignment with other disabled groups.<sup>37</sup>

There are many negative connections associated with disability in today's western societies. Given the historic treatment of people with disabilities, it may be understandable that deaf people do not want to be labeled "disabled". It also reveals differences within the broad category of "disability" and shows in part that Deaf people are more able to reject this label because their difference is less noticeable. This means that, unlike many blind people or people using wheelchairs, a deaf person's body is not "marked" as disabled unless the situation exposes an inability to hear. And even that, some cover with lip-reading skills which can not be taken for granted though. A common way to describe this is to say that deaf people "pass" as "normal" more easily than do many other people with disabilities.

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<sup>36</sup>For more information see: Catherine J. Kudlick, *Disability History: Why We Need Another 'Other'*, *American Historical Review* (June 2003): 763-793; Susan Burch and Ian Sutherland, *Who's Not here? Lessons in American Disability studies*, *Radical History Review* 94 (Winter 2006): 127-147.

<sup>37</sup>Carol Padden, and Tom Humphries, *DEAF in America: Voices from a culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988) 44.

## 2.5 Being deaf

The word "deaf" in this work refers primarily to the audiological condition, the inability to hear. This expresses deafness as a physical disorder, and interprets deafness solely within a medical model. Deafness may have many causes and can occur at various times in a person's life. The level of impairment may also vary. Only a minority of deaf people have inherited their deafness from their parents. Most of the time a person becomes deaf while still in the womb or shortly after it is born.<sup>38</sup>

In 1989 Ebbinghaus and Heßmann defined deafness as follows:

Als gehörlos gilt, wer gesprochene Sprache auch mit technischen Hilfsmitteln nicht mit der für menschliche Kommunikation erforderlichen Deutlichkeit auditiv wahrnehmen kann.<sup>39</sup>

A pragmatic definition is given by the deaf attorney Bonnie Poitras Tucker who in her autobiography simply puts it this way: "Meine Definition von absoluter Taubheit lautet also: die Unfähigkeit zu telefonieren."<sup>40</sup>

Both definition show, that when talking about deafness, we are talking about a physical impairment which limits communication in some way.

## 2.6 Being Hard of Hearing

Hearing impairment is the single most pervasive physical disability in the United States today. The National Center for Health statistics in 1980 announced, that "15 to 16 Million people in the U.S. had some degree of hearing impairment. There are approximately 2 million deaf and 14 million hard-of-hearing".<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Therefore there is the following distinction about the point of time when a person becomes deaf: Prenatal deafness which was cause during the pregnancy; Perinatal deafness which was cause during the aborning; Postnatal deafness which occurs during young childhood. Reasons for Prenatal deafness can be virus infections of the mother during the pregnancy like mumps or influenza or other diseases like diabetes or symptoms of poisoning due to nicotine, alcohol or medication. Perinatal deafness often occurs with premature births or mechanical injuries that happen while giving birth or anoxia. Postnatal deafness mostly is caused by inflammation of the middle ear followed by meningitis. Also a traumatic injury to the head caused by an accident can lead to deafness. The time when a person becomes deaf might be after the person was able to learn how to speak which will influence their speaking skill when being deaf. (See: Michael Kockert, *Zur Integration von nicht hörenden Kindern*, Magisterarbeit, Berlin, 2000) 17 and 19.

<sup>39</sup>H. Ebbinghaus and J. Hessmann, *Gehörlose. Gebärdensprache. Dolmetschen. Chancen und Integration einer sprachlichen Minderheit, Internationale Arbeiten zur Gebärdensprache und Kommunikation Gehörloser*, Bd. 7, (Hamburg, 1989) 4, in: Michael Kockert, *Zur Integration von nicht hörenden Kindern*, Magisterarbeit, (Berlin 2000) 18. Transl. by author: "Deaf is, who cannot, even though having technical devices; aurally observe spoken language with the for human communication necessary clearness."

<sup>40</sup>Bonnie Poitras Tucker, *Der Klang von fallendem Schnee*, (Augsburg, Weltbildverlag 2001) 95. Transl. by author: "My definition of deafness therefore is: the inability to make a phone call."

<sup>41</sup>Carol Gretson, In: *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness*. Vol. 1 (New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Comp. 1987) 276 - 279.

Terms like "semi-mute" (lost hearing after acquiring speech) or semi-deaf historically were used to describe those with partial deafness. The most common term today is "Hard-of-Hearing".

Most commonly used to describe hard-of-hearing is: "those in whom the sense of hearing, although defective, is functional with or without a hearing aid."<sup>42</sup> Different degrees of defectiveness, functioning levels or effect on every day life are not mentioned in this definition. To make slight distinctions adjectives as mild, moderately severe, and severe are used. Also mild or moderate hearing losses many times are undetected by parents or teachers and may lead to misdiagnose children as being lazy, stupid or simply disobedient.

Carol Gretson comes to an interesting conclusion about hard-of-hearing people. "While profoundly deaf people have been identified as 'outsiders in a hearing world', those who are hard-of-hearing can easily be labeled as outsiders in both the hearing and the deaf worlds. Hard-of-hearing people belong to two cultural worlds, the hearing and the deaf, but are not entirely a part of either."<sup>43</sup>

It is not possible to fully delineate "hard of hearing" from "deaf". For this work, I will refer mostly to deaf, which may at times include "hard of hearing people". The term Deaf, which is defined below, may also include hard of hearing people, so long as they also demonstrate specific cultural attributes that belong to the Deaf community.

## 2.7 Being Deaf

Just as some people differentiate black - the color, from Black - the community of people, many scholars and activists now use the word Deaf with a capitalized "D" in contrast to deaf with a lower case "d". This expresses that Deafness means more than being "deaf". Being Deaf also means being part of the Deaf community which is "referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language /.../ and a culture".<sup>44</sup> An important thing to be part of that community is to know a common sign language like ASL in the United States or DGS in Germany. Being Deaf has to do in part with making a decision to belong to a certain group and accept and share most of their values. Many qualities of Deaf communities demonstrate that they are a subculture. For example, they share a common folklore, a community heritage and often educational experiences. Deaf also tend to intermarry. Deaf communities frequently produce their own publications, and participate in their own athletic teams and clubs, as well as political associations; they recognize historical places that are unique to their cultural group and celebrate heroes from their society, people who did exceptional things on

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid. 276.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid. 279.

<sup>44</sup>Carol Padden, and Tom Humphries, *DEAF in America: Voices from a culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988), 2. Deaf children who are born to hearing parents who have no idea about an existing Deaf subculture show the opposite situation. For those parents the inability to hear is plainly seen as being deaf.

behalf of the "Deaf world". There are different opinions whether hearing people belong to Deaf culture. For some, being Deaf requires the experience of also being deaf. Concerning the hearing status and the belonging to the Deaf Community, a complicated group to judge are CODAs, the Children of Deaf Adults. CODAs are usually hearing people, but since their parents are deaf they many times grow up in the Deaf community and are fluent signers. Some identify more with Deaf culture than with the dominant, hearing world.<sup>45</sup>

One unique quality of Deaf culture is that its members usually are not born into the culture. They are not born being Deaf. Because most deaf people have hearing families, they "find" Deafness once they attend schools for the deaf or join associations later in life. This also gives evidence of being a subculture - dominant cultures usually influence people from birth forward.

## 2.8 Sign Language

Language is one of the defining features of Deaf culture. Today an increasing number of countries recognize sign language as an official language. Surprising to many, almost every country has its own unique sign language. In America, American Sign Language (ASL) is the one embraced by the Deaf, in Germany it is the German Sign Language (Deutsche Gebärdensprache/DGS). As with most nations, different regions of one country can, due to social linguistics, have variations or dialects of signs. Until the 1970s e.g., due to segregation in U.S., different varieties of sign language among the black and white deaf existed.<sup>46</sup>

It needs to be pointed out that sign language is a language which the Deaf community uses to facilitate information. It has its own linguistic grammatical structure. Many people think sign language is only a system that is not able to capture what a language can, this is not true. Even though signing systems do exist, like finger spelling where the roman letters are shown, signed exact English which follows the English grammar patterns, or the international sign system which tries to offer a universal system of communication. However, sign language is more than those existing systems. For many years, mainstream society doubted the authenticity of sign language as a language. In the 1950s and 1960s scholar William Stokoe proved, using standard criteria for judging language, that American Sign Language "is a manual language meaning that information is expressed not with combinations of sounds but with combinations of hand shapes, movements of the hands, arms and body, and facial expressions. As with other sign languages, or more properly, gestural-spatial languages, its grammar and syntax are separate and distinct from spoken language(s) spoken

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<sup>45</sup>Those children are usually hearing but they are born to Deaf parents and from their birth on grow up and identify with Deafness. Oftentimes CODAs function as a bridge between the hearing and the deaf worlds, are fluent signers, and stay connected with the Deaf Community for life.

<sup>46</sup>Carol Padden, and Tom Humphries, DEAF in America: Voices from a culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988), 4.

in its area of influence".<sup>47</sup> The roots of today's major sign languages were in Europe.

ASL "originated in the early 19th century at the first school for the deaf in America /.../ established by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. The first teacher at the school, Laurent Clerc came from France, and many of the first students were from Martha's Vineyard, where hereditary deafness was common. The influence of French Sign Language (FSL) on ASL is clear, and linguists believe that the Vineyard deaf had their own sign language, Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, that merged with FSL to create ASL".<sup>48</sup>

Another very important achievement is the recognition of sign language in more and more countries. After Stokoe proved in the 1960s that ASL is a language it was more and more accepted in the U.S. Other countries followed like Sweden (in the 1980s), even though Sweden, compared to other countries, shifts away from the traditional solutions of teaching speech and speaking skills, to solutions that use resources of Deaf people - their language and their social practices.<sup>49</sup> Finland accepted sign language in 1995.

Carol Padden and Tom Humphries state that "signed languages are far from the primitive gestural systems they had been assumed to be. Instead they are rich systems with complex structures that reflect their long histories."<sup>50</sup> They continue, adding that:

According to the common misconceptions about ASL, it is either a collection of individual gestures or a code on the hands for spoken English. But in fact, although ASL does use gesture, as English uses sound, it is not made up merely of gestures any more than English is made up merely of noises. Individual signs are themselves structured grammatical units, which are placed in slots within sentences according to grammatical rules. Signs are not a form of 'finger spelling', a manual system in which a hand configuration is used to represent a letter of the alphabet. Although signers may fingerspell an English term or a name, the bulk of their signed communication is made up not of finger spelling but of signs, which are structured according to an entirely independent set of rules.<sup>51</sup>

Following the pattern of languages, ASL is evolving to allow quick, easy and concise communication. It is not a visual form of English.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, the German Sign Language (Deutsche Gebärdensprache/DGS) is an independent language with different grammar than spoken German.<sup>53</sup> In a press release on March 26<sup>th</sup> 2002, the German Deaf Association announced the acknowledgement of the DGS as an official language:

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<sup>47</sup>[http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Sign\\_Language](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Sign_Language) (2 August 2005).

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Carol Padden, and Tom Humphries, DEAF in America: Voices from a culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988) 199.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid. 2.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid. 7.

<sup>52</sup>An artificial system called SEE exists but is not used by Deaf people.

<sup>53</sup>[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche\\_Geb%C3%A4rdensprache](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche_Geb%C3%A4rdensprache) (23. January 2006).

Der Deutsche Bundestag und der Bundesrat haben am 28. Februar bzw. am 22. März 2002 das ‚Gesetz zur Gleichstellung behinderter Menschen und zur Änderung anderer Gesetze‘ (Bundesgleichstellungsgesetz) beschlossen. Dieses wird zum 1. Mai 2002 in Kraft treten.

Kernstück des Gesetzes sind die Gleichstellung Behinderter und die Herstellung barrierefrei gestalteter Lebensbereiche. Behinderte Menschen sollen zu allen Lebensbereichen einen umfassenden Zugang haben und nicht diskriminiert werden.

Das Bundesgleichstellungsgesetz erkennt dazu auch die Deutsche Gebärdensprache als eigenständige Sprache an (§ 6). Damit wird der langjährigen Forderung des Deutschen Gehörlosen-Bundes endlich Rechnung getragen.

Der Deutsche Gehörlosen-Bund betrachtet diese Anerkennung in Verbindung mit dem Recht auf Verwendung der Deutschen Gebärdensprache (bzw. auf den Einsatz von Gebärdensprach-dolmetschern) in der Kommunikation mit den Bundesbehörden als einen weiteren wichtigen Schritt zum Abbau von Kommunikationsbarrieren gehörloser und hochgradig schwerhöriger Bürger (§ 9).

Der Deutsche Gehörlosen-Bund hofft, dass die Bundesländer diesem Beispiel in der nächsten Zeit mit Landesgleichstellungsgesetzen folgen. Dabei sollte auch der Einsatz der Deutschen Gebärdensprache in den Hörgeschädigtenschulen (insbesondere für gehörlose Schüler) und der barrierefreie Zugang von Gehörlosen zu den Medien gesetzlich geregelt werden.<sup>54</sup>

This was a big step forward for the German Deaf community and raises their hope of improvement, improvement in the education of sign language interpreters, the right to have an interpreter and Sign language interpretation of more events.

The German Sign Language, as well as ASL is also described as a visual language that includes posture, mimic and signs and the signs are distinguished by the shape of the hand(s), the position of the hand, the place of fulfillment and the movement of the hands. German Sign Language also has a finger alphabet.<sup>55</sup>

There have been attempts to create an international sign language, and many international

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<sup>54</sup>[http://www.gehoerlosenbund.de/archiv/2002/gebaerdensprache\\_anerkannt.htm](http://www.gehoerlosenbund.de/archiv/2002/gebaerdensprache_anerkannt.htm) (23. January 2006). Transl. by author: On Feb. 28<sup>th</sup> or better to say on March 22<sup>nd</sup> of 2002, the lower house of the German parliament and the federal council have passed the bill of the equal rights law for disabled people. This law will become operative on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2002. The focus of this law is the equalization of disabled people and the establishment of habitats without barriers and obstacles. Disabled people should have admission to all habitats and not be discriminated. The German equalization law therefore acknowledges the German Sign Language as official language (§ 6). With that a longstanding demand of the German Deaf Association (DGB) was finally accommodated. The DGB considers this approval in connection with the right to application (the assignment of Sign Language interpreters) in the communication of the Federal Authority as a further step to dismantle communication barriers of deaf or hard of hearing people (§ 9). The DGB hopes, that the federal states will follow this example in the near future with state equality laws. In doing so also the issue of insertion of DGS in schools for the hearing impaired (especially for deaf scholars) and the barrier free access for the deaf to the media should be regulated by law.

<sup>55</sup>A form of voice accompanying sign language (Lautsprachbegleitende Gebärden oder Gebärdetes Deutsch), similar to signed exact English (SEE) exists.

deaf conferences and events include international sign interpreters and presenters. The pre-stage for an international sign language has been gestundo which is Italian and alludes to the unification of sign language. It is a constructed sign language that for the first time was discussed during the world congress of the "World Federation of the Deaf" in 1951.<sup>56</sup> As with Asperanto, Gestundo facilitates communication, but has significant linguistic limitations. It can be more seen as a system since it does not capture cultural subtleties that the various national, authentic sign languages express. Still, it serves as an important vehicle for signing communities around the world to exchange information and demonstrate close ties with one another. Since 2002 DGS is an official language in Germany.

In recent years in America, ASL has become a popular foreign language in schools where it is offered.<sup>57</sup> The American journalist Kerstin A. Conover talks about the acknowledgment of ASL as a foreign language in the American school system. Her article is titled as follows: "In Gesture Toward Change, Schools Sign On to 'Signing'". It talks about the high interest of students to take ASL classes in the fall semester of 1997. At the Purdue University some four hundred students had to be turned away because classes were already full. Diane Brentari, an ASL linguist at Purdue said: "The demand for college-level sign-language classes is increasing nationally and more colleges and universities are approving ASL for foreign-language or second-language credit." The linguist Harlan Lane who, according to the article, considers ASL as a foreign language since 1974 states that "The picture has changed radically over the past 20 years".<sup>58</sup>

Also in Germany the interest in Sign Language and the quality of sign languages classes or courses increases. The sign language school "Lings", in the state of Nordrheinwestfalen states it clearly on their website, that there is increasing interest by hearing people to learn sign language.<sup>59</sup> Basic sign language courses can be taken in twelve of the sixteen German states. Almost all the bigger cities like Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, Leipzig or Bremen offer

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<sup>56</sup><http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gestuno> (23. January 2006).

<sup>57</sup>An interesting article written in December 1997 by Kirsten A. Conover, a Staff writer of the Christian Science Monitor.

<sup>58</sup><http://csmonitor.com/cgi-bin/durableRedirect.pl?durable/1997/12/18/feat/learning.1.html>

<sup>59</sup>„Die Einrichtung des Landesinstituts für Gebärdensprache im Jahre 1995 erfolgte aufgrund der Erfahrung, dass das Interesse Hörender an der Erlernung der Deutschen Gebärdensprache stetig wächst und die entsprechende Nachfrage nach Sprachkursen nicht durch z.B. das Angebot der Volkshochschulen gedeckt werden kann, zumal die umfangreichen zu vermittelnden Inhalte nicht im Rahmen der üblichen Kursdauer und Unterrichtsformen erworben werden können. Durch die Gründung eines Instituts für Gebärdensprache, welches dem Landesverband der Gehörlosen in Essen assoziiert ist, wurde die Möglichkeit eröffnet, ein äußerst vielseitiges und bis heute kontinuierlich wachsendes Ausbildungsangebot in Deutscher Gebärdensprache zu erarbeiten. Die Unterrichtskonzepte wurden speziell auf die Anliegen verschiedener Interessentenkreise abgestimmt, d.h. die Bandbreite der Kurse umfasst sowohl die Vermittlung von Sprachkenntnissen für die alltägliche Verständigung mit Gehörlosen als auch Angebote, welche konkret entwickelt wurden im Hinblick auf die Bedürfnisse bestimmter Berufsgruppen (Erzieher, Pädagogen, Sozialarbeiter, Ausbilder, Gehörlosenseelsorger u.a.), deren Angehörige auf eine funktionierende Kommunikation mit Gehörlosen angewiesen sind.“  
<http://www.lingsnrw.de/>

courses and also the education of sign language interpreters is increasing and improving. Close to a dozen different programs exist.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>For more Info see: <http://www.taubenschlag.de>. There are listings of the different Institutions that offer courses.

### 3 Theoretical frame

As theoretical frame for this paper, I rely heavily on Albert K Cohen's A general theory of subculture (1955). This work can be called a milestone in the discussion of subcultures. In his work, Cohen goes all the way back to the nature of human problems and their goal to solve problems. Also part of the theoretical frame will be the subcultural theory by Rolf Schwendter (1973). Even though his approach is several decades old, its criteria for defining subcultures still have resonance. These will be used to clarify what defines a subculture and if Deaf communities can be seen as one. Using factors outlined by Cohen and Schwendter, I will show that Deaf communities are a subculture.

#### 3.1 Cohen's subculture theory (1955)

Albert K. Cohen based his theory of subcultures on sociological concepts. He talks about basic subcultures that are an opposition of the dominant society and reach for autonomy. With his basic theoretical assumptions he creates a model of subculture.

He starts by pointing out the "'psychogenic' assumption, that all human action -/.../ - is an ongoing series of efforts to solve problems". Problems "all involve, until they are resolved a certain tension, a disequilibrium and a challenge. What people do depends upon the problems they contend with. If we want to explain what people do, then we want to be clear about the nature of human problems and what produces them".<sup>61</sup> This statement can be applied on every living individual their actions and the problems that caused the actions. If we want to explain what deaf people do, including why and how they do it, we need to understand what it means to be Deaf and how one can become Deaf. Cohen states that there are only two sources that cause problems; one is the actors "frame of reference" and the second is the "situation" that he confronts. In his opinion all problems can be solved if either one or both, meaning the "frame of reference" or the "situation", are changed. For a Deaf person the "frame of reference" can be seen in the fact that they use sign language to communicate or that some do not prefer voicing because they became deaf before developing speech which makes voicing for them very hard. This is different than how the majority of the society communicates. Therefore it can cause problems or barriers. Situations the Deaf might confront can be seen in every day encounters like: not hearing a door bell, making a noise that offends other hearing individuals that the deaf person is not aware of because he or she cannot hear him/herself, missing conversations because he/she cannot access spoken dialogue, or asking for a pen and a piece of paper to communicate in written language with a hearing person who does not understand him.

The world we live in includes our physical setting. What individuals experience and

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<sup>61</sup>Albert K. Cohen, A general theory of subcultures, (1955). In: Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, The subcultures reader, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 44-46.

how one feels about it depends as much on the "point of view" as on the situation which the individual encounters. According to Cohen, if there are problems, one tries to solve them. It becomes difficult though, when there are problems, "for which we have no ready-at-hand solutions". This is true for a Deaf person. Many hearing may see assistive devices like hearing aids or implants as a solution. But most Deaf do not. For some, the devices cannot cure their condition. For many, attempts to "cure" conflict with their identification as a cultural group rather than a disabled one. Those problems raise "feelings of tension, frustration, resentment, guilt, bitterness, anxiety or hopelessness".<sup>62</sup> To put it simply, many Deaf people feel that they are not "broken" because they cannot hear. They resent efforts to "fix" them when they are not broken. Because they have a language and a rich cultural community, the argument follows, Deaf people are not truly impaired. Their greatest barrier is the discrimination they face by hearing people.

Cohen mentions a second factor that is essential for defining a theory of subcultures. "Human problems are not distributed in a random way among the roles that make up a social system. Each age, racial and ethnic category, each occupation, economic stratum and social class consists of people who have been equipped by their society with frames of references and confronted by their society with situations which are not equally characteristic of other roles".<sup>63</sup>

In Cohen's theory "the emergence of these 'group' standards, of this shared frame of reference, is the emergence of a new subculture. It is cultural because each actor's participation in this system of norms is influenced by his perception of the same norms in other actors. It is subcultural because the norms are shared only among those actors who stand somehow to profit from them and who find in one another a sympathetic moral climate which within these norms may come to fruition and persist. In this fashion culture is continually being created, re-created and modified wherever individuals sense in one another like needs, generated by like circumstances, not shared in generally in the larger social system. Once established, such a subcultural system may persist, but not by sheer inertia. It may achieve a life which outlasts that of the individuals who participated in its creation, but only so long as it continues to serve the needs of those who succeed its creators".<sup>64</sup>

Subcultures often develop as people attempt to find a solution for status problems. Status includes achieving respect in the eyes of society. Such movements of trying to achieve respect can be seen in diverse social groups as the Nazi party, the Mormons, or the Cherokee Nation. They might explain some "collective reactions to status problems which arise during the process of assimilation into a culture and social system dominated by white people".<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Albert K. Cohen, *A general theory of subcultures*, (1955). In: Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, *The subcultures reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 51.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid. 44-46.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid. 51.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid. 52.

Cohen sees a difference of statuses between the subculture and the dominant culture. "As the new subculture represents a new status system by sanctioning behavior tabooed or frowned upon by the larger society, the acquisition of status within the new group is accompanied by a loss of status outside the group."<sup>66</sup> Historically, Deaf did lose status by remaining separate, they were seen as inferior. The understanding of sign language as a natural language in the beginning of the nineteenth century changed towards the end of the century, due to sciences, in an understanding of a primitive "monkey" language that was based on gestures. Deaf people became "other" even though they looked like the dominant hearing society, until they started to talk.<sup>67</sup>

Cohen concludes his theoretical model by saying, that "the existence of problems of adjustment, /.../ is not sufficient to insure the emergence of a subcultural solution."<sup>68</sup> This basically means not all people who have problems will join a subculture. Also important is that the "free choice of associates may be regulated by persons in power, as parents may regulate the associates of their children".<sup>69</sup> That came true for many Deaf children throughout history. Their parents wanted them to be part of the mainstream society and did not let them go to schools for the deaf. Also there have been schools where the deaf were not allowed to freely communicate because signing was forbidden. That also influences the development of a subculture. Cohen puts it this way: "Because of /.../ restraints and barriers to communication, as well as the costs of participation in subcultural groups, which may sometimes be counted excessive, subcultural solutions may not emerge, or particular individuals may not participate in them".<sup>70</sup> This also is true when looking at the deaf. Before schools for the deaf were established (1817) deaf people were geographically scattered throughout the U.S. Without schools, which provided language, deaf generally had little means to communicate with anyone - hearing or deaf. Evidence suggests that there were virtually no examples of actual Deaf identified cultural communities until schools emerged in the late eighteenth century in Europe and early nineteenth century in the U.S. From then on it can be noticed, that Deaf people settled around deaf schools, so that education was provided and a Deaf community nearby.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid. 52-53.

<sup>67</sup>See, for example, Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>68</sup>Albert K. Cohen, *A general theory of subcultures*, (1955). In: Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, *The subcultures reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 54.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid. 54.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid. 54.

<sup>71</sup>See, for example, John van Cleve and Barry Crouch, *A Place of Their Own* (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1988); Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

### 3.2 The theory of Subcultures by Rolf Schwendter (1973)

Next to the term subculture other words have been used to describe the same phenomena. Rudi Dutschke used the term "Gegenmilieu"<sup>72</sup> Herbert Marcuse was talking about "Randschichten"<sup>73</sup> and Walter Hollstein made a distinction between a part culture and an opposite culture. A part culture for him is a system of values and behavior within the system of the dominant culture.<sup>74</sup> An opposite culture is a progressive culture that decided to show opposition to the dominant culture. When Schwendter was writing his book in the 1970s he did not see the problem in informing the society about groups that can be called a subculture rather than to defend the term against misinterpretations and make the term subculture a basic principle for a middle range theory for the common society to enable people to include subcultural experiences into every day life. He was inspired by Cohen's theory from the 1950s.

Swendter's goal is to give a helpful approach to satisfy the actual and potential changer of society which he calls "progressive Subculture". According to Schwendter the following contemporary groups have been labeled as subculture, namely: "Hippies, Provos, students rockers, /.../ puritans, /.../ Jews, /.../ Bohemians, laborers, criminals, alcoholics, /.../ prostitutes, handicapped, the colored minority, the German youth movement /.../", to only name a few. Schwendter points out though and also adds to Cohen's understanding, that

Der Begriff 'Subkultur' muss nach der Analyse der jeweiligen historischen Situation inhaltlich gefüllt werden - ebenso, wie er wertfrei ist und nach der Funktion der jeweiligen Subkulturen bewertet zu werden hat. In der Praxis wurde der Begriff in den letzten Jahren jedoch zum Schimpfwort degradiert.<sup>75</sup>

The author points out very important facts. To understand a subculture one needs to know about the history behind it. It is essential to eliminate prejudices and plainly look at the function and reasons why a subculture separates from the dominant culture. The term "subculture" should be free of values, meaning a variation of existing cultures and not a "lower" culture.<sup>76</sup>

According to Schwendter there are many reasons why we need a theory of subcultures. There are parts of the society that vary from the dominant culture. To take a closer look

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<sup>72</sup>Opposite milieu; translated by author

<sup>73</sup>Marginalized society, translated by author

<sup>74</sup>Walter Holstein, Der Untergrund, (Neuwied-Berlin, 1969) 17. In: e.g. Sutherland-Woodward, Introductory Sociology, (Chicago 1952) 147, in: Rolf Schwendter, Theorie der Subkulturen, (Köln: Kippenheuter & Witsch, 1973) 11.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. Rolf Schwendter, Theorie der Subkulturen, (Köln: Kippenheuter & Witsch, 1973) 11-12. Transl. by author: The term "subculture" has to be filled in content after analyzing the prevailing historic situation - as well as the term is value-free and must be judged by the function of the prevailing subculture. In practice though, the term was degraded to an invective throughout the past years.

<sup>76</sup>During a presentation concerning the topic Deaf as a subculture at the Gallaudet University on Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, the problem of the misinterpretation of the term subculture became clear again, when Deaf students asked, why they should be a subculture and not just a culture.

at subcultures (especially progressive subcultures) can lead to general, positive changes.<sup>77</sup> Also, the ruling majority through repression fails to integrate the subcultures and uses the negative meaning of subculture to stabilize their own dominant culture, including norms and institutions.<sup>78</sup> Subcultures, in a broader sense, are necessary to enable democracy because they introduce opposite views, new ways of social relations and eliminate the dependency on the ruling institutions. In addition, subcultures are dialectically depending on the general dominant society and prevent total adaptation which could lead to communism. The latter reason is very political and will not be used to show the meaning of a subcultural theory for the Deaf.

Through different graphics Schwendter shows how subcultures are part of a compact majority, ruled by an establishment.

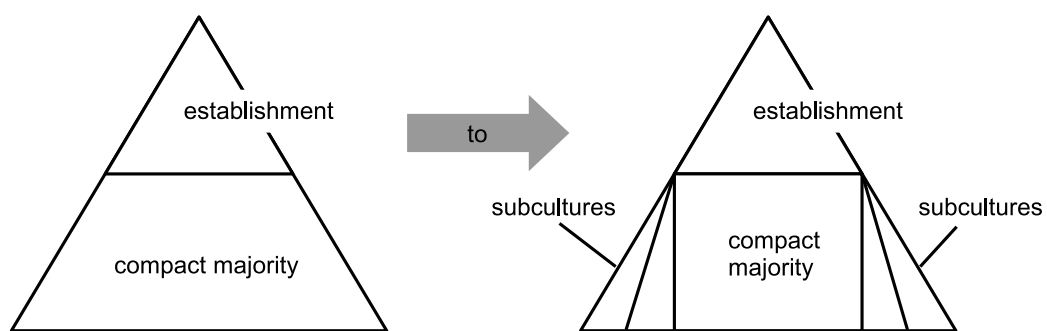


Figure 1: Schwendter, Rolf: Theorie der Subkulturen, S. 36

Swendter distinguishes between progressive and regressive subcultures. Where the former is the more active one that tries to abolish, or improve existing society norms and change present position of the majority and pushes forward. The latter serves more to restore or reestablish past positions of society, norms that are not present anymore in today's society (an example might be the Amish, add. by author).<sup>79</sup>

Within the progressive subcultures he makes another distinction between emotional subcultures, which focus on individual freedom, like Hippies or esoteric groups, and rational subcultures that concentrate on the analysis of the compact majority and unintentional subcultures and looks at realistic chances to change the environment. Rational subcultures for him include political subcultures or students and intellectual groups.<sup>80</sup>

There are many different relations between subcultures and the dominant society. Schwendter illustrates those through different integration and disintegration mechanisms.

<sup>77</sup>As example one could look at the Deaf President Now movement where deaf people in a one week strike in 1989 achieved the resignation of the elected hearing President and a new deaf President, I. King Jordan, who still is President today.

<sup>78</sup>This can be recognized in the disability discussion. For further information see: Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Ubansky, The New Disability History (New York: New York University Press).

<sup>79</sup>Cf. Rolf Schwendter, Theorie der Subkulturen (Köln: Kippenheuter & Witsch, 1973), 37.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Ibid. 40.

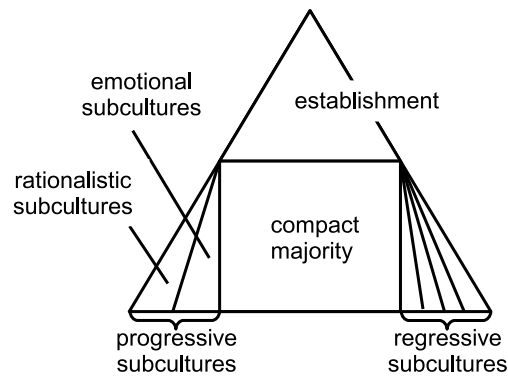


Figure 2: Schwendter, Rolf: Theorie der Subkulturen, S. 40

He shows many different variations of possible movements and changes of subcultures. For example, one part of the compact majority ascends into the establishment or the other way around, or a progressive subculture capsizes/changes partly into the establishment, partly into the compact majority. This might be the most experienced case which often is called socialization, integration or customization.<sup>81</sup>

A unique relation between the subculture and the dominant culture occurs in the case of Children of Deaf Adults, also known as CODAs. Those children are sometimes also called "bridge kids", since they are able to build a bridge between the hearing and the Deaf world, because those children often grow up bilingual. They are fluent in sign language and the spoken language of the dominant society. Schwendter summarizes that subcultures are a product of the prevailing historical circumstances. He adds that our history is a history of class conflict where the dominant class eliminated needs and different standards. That some of those existing needs and standards of the ruled minority were acknowledged is a matter of fact caused by the interests of the rulers to unfold further efficiency of labor.<sup>82</sup> An example for this might be the discrimination of the slaves throughout history in the US. Or, concerning the Deaf, an example would be the large Deaf community that established in Akron, Ohio during World I. "Akron was home of the Goodyear and Firestone rubber companies and during WW I both companies actively sought deaf factory workers to meet their demand for tire production".<sup>83</sup> Akron, Ohio was the place where deaf adults gathered as thriving community which, because of their opportunity to work and live within a Deaf community, attracted the Deaf from all over the nation. This kind of opportunity came up again in World War II. In early 1942 the Good Year Corporation "launched a national drive for deaf workers". The need for workers grew with the ongoing of the war overseas. "By 1944 more than one thousand deaf people had joined" the production. The war dominated the production

<sup>81</sup>Cf. Rolf Schwendter, Theorie der Subkulturen (Köln: Kippenheuter & Witsch,1973), 59.

<sup>82</sup>Cf. Ibid. 130.

<sup>83</sup>John Vickrey van Cleve and Barry A. Crouch, A Place of Their Own (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), 163.

needs and "Managers at Firestone and Goodyear employed special but simple measures to ensure the rapid and successful training and integration of their deaf employees. Instead of spoken lectures poorly suited for deaf employees, staff relied upon thorough demonstrations at the job site. The case of Akron, Ohio still is very unique and shows that the employment of deaf people is possible. /.../ deaf workers neither requested nor received special attention. Deaf men and women demonstrated their skills at a wide array of semiskilled, skilled and professional positions, and they earned positive appraisals from their supervisors". Next to their work "Akron's deaf residents /.../ created a flourishing community of social, cultural, civic, and recreational organizations /.../".<sup>84</sup> The time of war can be seen as the first time in history where almost all deaf individuals who were looking for work found employment.<sup>85</sup>

According to Schwendter almost all progressive subcultures have organized nonviolent actions even though some might have been ineffective in the end. But without active opposition it is impossible to replace the dominant culture from their ruling position or to achieve equal rights.<sup>86</sup> That also is true for the American Deaf Community which reached international attention through the one-week long "Deaf President NOW"<sup>87</sup> movement which took place in 1988 at Gallaudet University. During the "Deaf President NOW" movement Deaf people from many different places throughout the US, for one week in March 1988, peacefully closed down Gallaudet University due to the appointing of once again another hearing President for the University. The Deaf wanted to point out that it was time now do have a Deaf person be elected as President for a Deaf University.<sup>88</sup> It was a successful Revolution: all demands were fulfilled, the appointed President Dr. Elizabeth Zinser resigned, a deaf President, I. King Jordan, was appointed. From then on the majority in the Board of Trustees of Gallaudet University is Deaf and there were no reprisals against involved faculty, staff or students.

As for Schwendter's theory, by using the labor movement as an example he shows six criteria that prove a group's status as a subculture. These can also be found within the Deaf community. The six criteria are:

- ▷ different norms than the dominant society

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<sup>84</sup>Robert M. Buchanan, Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory 1850-1950 (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet UP), 108-109.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid. 113.

<sup>86</sup>Cf. Rolf Schwendter, Theorie der Subkulturen (Köln: Kippenheuter & Witsch, 1973), 151.

<sup>87</sup>Through that movement which only was a week long, the Gallaudet University elected their first deaf President since all the former Presidents had been hearing.

<sup>88</sup>All citations from Jack R. Gannon, The Week the World Heard Gallaudet, (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989) "If deaf persons are not considered good enough to run the University, then what's the point of having a university for deaf people?" Dr. Allen Sussman (Class of 1955) Gallaudet Faculty member, 33; "I think it's time for a new perspective, one that only a deaf person can offer." Dr. Harvey J. Corson (Class of 1964) Superintendent, Louisiana School for the deaf, 58; "We need a president in this time and age who is sensitive, understands, exemplifies and advocates for the deaf, not just by rhetoric but by being a living example." Gary Olson (Class of 1965), Executive Director, National Association of the Deaf, 61.

- ▷ self organization of their needs
- ▷ opposite public
- ▷ opposite milieu
- ▷ opposite economy
- ▷ opposite institutions

Those criteria can function as a great tool to proof if a subculture can be called a subculture or not. For the case of the Deaf, only the first five criteria will be used. What do those criteria mean?

*Different norms* than the dominant society, can mean many things, including sexual freedom, religious freedom, different clothing. But it can also mean a different language than the common language of the dominant society. For the Deaf this would be the most common sign language. In the U.S. this language would be ASL, in Germany DGS. Next to language there are also different ways of greeting one another or a different use of personal space within the Deaf community. Eye contact is very important and many times physical touching is involved in conversations.

The *self organization* of the needs of a subculture could be consumer cooperation, or any club or union that tries to organize the needs of a certain group. Some examples for Deaf in America include the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), or various state associations for the Deaf, and the National Fraternal Association of the Deaf. National Associations can be found in many other countries in the World. In Germany representative is the "Deutsche Gehörlosen-Bund e.V."

An *opposite public* may include specific libraries, newspapers, magazines or Universities that have a certain group of people as their target group. Concerning a Deaf subculture, Gallaudet University, including its library, may function as an example for an opposite public, as well as magazines like Deaf Life in America or Das Zeichen in Germany. The opposition press has reached a subcultural mass basis.

An *opposite milieu* can be seen in sport clubs for a certain group, as seen in the Deaf Sports Organization for the Deaf in the US, "the American Athletic Association of the Deaf" (AAAD), the "Deutscher Gehörlosen-Sportverband" in Germany, or the "International Sports organization of the Deaf", which holds the Deaflympics. Padden and Humphries state, that "Sports organizations like there are one of the few places where Deaf people exercise almost total control over their own affairs, from deciding their own rules to determining who qualifies as a member".<sup>89</sup> Those clubs and associations hold very important functions for

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<sup>89</sup>Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, DEAF In America: Voices from a culture, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988), 49.

the members of a subculture. Opposite milieus offer a great opportunity to get used to new norms and to connect political and personal goals.

*Opposite economies* are businesses owned or mostly run by a certain subculture. In America an example is the Laurent Company, run by the Deaf individual Marvin Miller, with the goal to build a City for a signing community in South Dakota, named: Laurent, SD.<sup>90</sup> Other examples are Harris Communications<sup>91</sup>, a business for communication devices, DawnSign Press<sup>92</sup> which provides American Sign Language Materials or the National Fraternal Society for the Deaf which first started to provide insurances for deaf individuals who where until 1898 excluded from any insurance coverage.<sup>93</sup> In Germany examples are online shops like "deskavi"<sup>94</sup> for clothing or "basta-versand"<sup>95</sup> for hearing devices, which are run by Deaf individuals.

Schwendter makes it very clear when he states that the fights of the different progressive subcultures against the ruling society might be the last opportunity for democracy, human rights and alienation within one society. This shows how important subcultures are. He also points out though, that subcultures also have to be able to leave an opposition group at any time if the ruling society does not accept them anymore. Meaning one should not only rely on the opposition establishments but also be able to get along within the dominant society.<sup>96</sup> Or be able to integrate to some extend.

Another factor that supports the argument for being a subculture comes from Yerker Anderson. He states that: "Endogamy or marriage within a social group is a good indicator of cultural solidarity. The endogamy rate among the deaf population tends to be high in most countries."<sup>97</sup>

### **3.3 Trying to define Subculture and what a theory of subculture has to offer**

In the Handbuch Soziologie<sup>98</sup> Hildegard Müller Kohlenberg addresses what a theory of subculture needs to clarify. According to her understanding it needs to clarify in what kind of relation the dominant culture and the subculture exist. This can be a complex issue. Many times when talking about subcultures the youth is mentioned. Meaning a theory of subculture has to make clear what relations between the youth and the dominating adults

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<sup>90</sup>For more information see: <http://www.laurentsd.com>.

<sup>91</sup>For more information see: <http://www.harriscomm.com/catalog/aboutus.php>.

<sup>92</sup>For more information see: <http://www.dawnsign.com/index.html>.

<sup>93</sup>See Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 104-106.

<sup>94</sup>For more information see: <http://www.deskavi.de>.

<sup>95</sup>For more information see: <http://www.basta-versand.de>.

<sup>96</sup>Cf. Rolf Schwendter, *Theorie der Subkulturen* (Köln: Kippenheuter & Witsch, 1973), 191-279.

<sup>97</sup>Yerker Anderson, *Culture and Subculture*, In: John v. Cleve, Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness, (New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, 1987) 264.

<sup>98</sup>Transl. by author: Handbook of sociology

exist. Relations in this case could be a parents-child relation or a teacher - pupil relation. Regarding Deaf people as a subculture it means their relations to the dominant hearing culture. Those relations can be seen between hearing parents - Deaf child, hearing neighbor - Deaf neighbor, Deaf employee - hearing employer and so forth.

In the chapter "Subkultur" in the handbook of sociology Müller-Kohlenberg gives an overview of different subculture approaches or theories. She then compares the different models and tries to structure the different approaches towards subcultures. According to her structure there are spontaneous and unintentional subcultures. Spontaneous subcultures are groups that gather after a short amount of time e.g. a fan group, people who are into a certain fashion or new sports, unintentional subcultures do not choose to be a subculture but they are one for different reasons which in most cases cannot be changed, as ethnicity, religion, gender. For the deaf both kinds of subcultures can be true; unintentionally they can belong to a subculture because of their hearing impairment but there are also spontaneous subcultures within the deaf subculture where it is the volition of an individual to belong e.g. to a certain club or organization. Both subcultures either way can only develop a subcultural identity if the dominant culture ostracizes the minority culture.<sup>99</sup> Other structural models are progressive and regressive as well as rational and emotional subcultures (Schwendter, 1973) and also offender and legal subcultures. Offender subcultures are criminal groups which many times can be found in the slums or ghettos.

She criticizes back than (1984), that women were not mentioned for a long time and also unemployment as reason to become part of e.g. a criminal subculture were not mentioned in any of the approaches. That Deaf people are not mentioned is unnoticed. She goes on and states that through emancipation of woman new feminist subcultures were created and the political and societal impact of those subcultures can not be overrated. Because of those new subcultures societal conflicts are reflected in a new light.<sup>100</sup> That also comes true if the Deaf as a subculture would be accepted and included. She points out that because of manifold subcultural groups appraisal factors are necessary. This is offered by Schwender's theory.

If one does not want to see it as an additive model of co-existence next to each other, we need to take a clear look at social analytical aspects.

### **3.4 What does the subcultural theory offer?**

Many Deaf do not want to be called a subculture they just want to be seen as a culture; a Deaf culture. This is due to misunderstandings of the term subculture. If the Deaf accept the term and also scholars realize that the Deaf are a subculture the subcultural theory offers a way towards a better understanding of Deafness.

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<sup>99</sup>Cf. Harald Kerber and Arnold Schmieder, ed. *Handbuch Soziologie, Zur Theorie und Praxis sozialer Beziehungen*, (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rohwolt, 1984), 590-594.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid. 590-594.

Creating a subculture was commenced due to the discomfort that deaf people were opposed in the hearing world. Therefore, deaf people were looking for a social setting, where they would be understood. A subculture is the solution.

Cohen states, that what leads to subcultures is the existence of "the crucial condition for the emergence of new cultural forms, in effective interaction with one another, of a number of actors with similar problems of adjustment".<sup>101</sup> Even though the establishment of a subculture might seem clear, Deaf people are often seen as disabled and Deaf studies as a subgenre of Disability studies.<sup>102</sup> This might be a helpful academic approach but it should not be the only one since many deaf disagree with the label of being disabled. Therefore, the Disability Studies approach as well as the Deaf Studies approach should not be the only ones.

The subcultural approach could lead out of the negatively connoted disability discussion, into a more positive discussion of more understanding and respect. If Deaf people can be seen as a subculture, they should be included in academic discussions along with race, ethnicity, gender and class. Not only in the field of Social Studies. A subcultural theory is helpful because it facilitates an adaptation into fields like Sociology, general History, Political Sciences or Cultural Studies. This theory is also instrumental to structure the even more complex term of culture and alludes to minority groups which in some way can be found in basically all cultures. But a subculture is more than a minority group.

A fact that one looks at, to understand a culture, often is their education system and the history of education. Education is an important factor in developing a sense of cultural identity. If one applies Deaf culture to America's history of education, a new image appears. For example, American states began supporting deaf education before they committed to sponsoring free education for hearing students. The first school for the deaf was established 1817, public schools for hearing children were established in the 1820s. This raises interesting questions about how Americans viewed state government's responsibility towards citizens. When looking at education today it is interesting, that Gallaudet University is one of only two federal universities.<sup>103</sup> Another example in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, American public education promoted a sense of unified American identity, especially by emphasizing spoken English. But residential schools for the Deaf, while supported by state governments, fostered a separate cultural and linguistic identity as those residential schools promoted sign language and Deaf cultural values.<sup>104</sup> This complicates and enhances our understanding of actual American culture and its subcultures.

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<sup>101</sup>Albert K. Cohen, *A general theory of subcultures*, (1955). In: Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, *The subcultures reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 48.

<sup>102</sup>Catherine J. Kudlick, *Disability History: Why We Need Another "Other"*. In: *American Historical Review*, June 2003, P. 768-769. "Deaf history is the most highly developed subgenre of disability studies /.../ which might be caused by the Deaf organizational lead."

<sup>103</sup>The other federal University is Howard University, which primarily serves African Americans

<sup>104</sup>Cf. Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 129-132.

The model of Deaf as subculture has interesting possibilities for expanding our general notion of social identity. Commonly, scholars refer to race, class, and gender when they examine cultures. If Deaf would become a fourth category, cultural understanding would reach a new frontier.

One case where that has been revealed can be seen in Susan Burch's example of Junius Wilson in her book Signs of Resistance. There, Burch highlights how deafness complicates notions of race, class, and gender. This life story of a black deaf man from the working class also complicates our understanding of a culture. Junius Wilson, an African American deaf man, probably born in 1908 grew up in North Carolina. Since his parents were hearing, he was sent to the "residential program at the Colored Department of the North Carolina School for the Blind and Deaf in Raleigh" at age seven. While at school he received some education and probably also some vocational training. He also learned a sign language known as the "Raleigh sign language" which differed from ASL, the language mostly used by white Deaf people. "Wilson's career at the North Carolina School ended when he was sixteen." He was sent home to his family and underwent a huge life change. His family did not know how to communicate with him. He was not prepared for a life on his own neither was his family prepared for his coming home. "Wilson himself was not ready for the events that followed his reunion in Castle Hayne [his hometown]. In /.../ 1925 his uncle, Arthur Smith, accused him of attempting to rape Lizzie Smith, Junius' aunt. The police arrested Wilson." The following trial was first of all dominated by white, hearing men who had no idea about deafness and it is not sure if his deafness was considered at all. The trial ended with Wilson being judged as incompetent or insane. "The lunacy jury spared Wilson a legal trial and the crushing desperation of prison incarceration. However, the judge condemned him to indefinite imprisonment in an equally dismal institution in Goldsboro: the State Hospital for the Colored Insane (later renamed Cherry Hospital)." But Wilson's tragedy was not over yet. In 1929 sterilization of "mental defectives and feeble-minded inmates of charitable and penal institutions" was approved as therapeutic procedure. Therefore, in 1931 Junius Wilson was sterilized. He stayed at the Cherry Hospital for seventy-six years. A legal suite against the state on Wilson's behalf was held in the 1990s, but that could not get him out of the Hospital. "The out-of-court settlement provided for Wilson's continuing care. It also gave him a small house on the grounds of the hospital. Having spent more than half a century within the institution, he did not have the life skills or health to assimilate fully into mainstream society." He was stuck in a place where he did not belong to but depending on. The hospital staff described him as "a gentle, stocky, child-like resident, who spent most of his days watching television working with a sign language tutor, or entertaining friendly visitors. /.../ Wilson never expressed bitterness or resentment." On March 17, 2001 he passed away.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

This example shows us that race does not always provide the most significant factor of identity. Although Wilson, because of his race, attended segregated school and faced Jim Crow discrimination, his Deaf identity separated him from his biological family and from the broader African American community. Likewise, his deafness made him different from other African American men, because his education and communication were defined by his physical and cultural Deafness. Deafness also disrupted a common sense of class, of economic identity. Trained differently in his residential school, Junius Wilson and his classmates had different employment options than their hearing peers.

When applying a theory of subculture to the Deaf, it becomes clear from an academic point of view, that the Deaf can be seen as a subculture. This theoretical, subcultural approach makes it possible to include the Deaf Subculture into different academic fields.

This understanding can offer scholars an even broader approach to today's society issues. On one hand the subcultural approach simplifies even more complex cultural approaches. On the other hand it changes views and perspectives of the understanding of human kind and the human right of equality. This theoretical approach also offers scholars a tool to include the Deaf Subculture into different academic fields. Also, recognizing sign languages as real languages expands our understanding of language, communication, teaching, etc. Simply defining the Deaf as a linguistic minority group misses the broader cultural society and attribute. If scholars actually start to incorporate Deaf as a subculture into their own theories and practices it will be interesting what different perspectives of culture, society and understanding of human kind will be revealed.

## 4 Eye-Identity: Deaf identity

To better understand Deaf culture, this chapter will take a look at the importance of language and history to develop a distinct identity. It is almost impossible to talk about deaf history without talking about language.

### 4.1 Language as foundation for a strong identity

When sign language first was introduced to the United States, Rev. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet called the sign language a divine Gift of God, a natural language that was created for the deaf. Before Gallaudet and Clerc brought over the French Sign Language and the opportunity of education in sign language, deaf people often were isolated from others because of their impairment. But when people began to investigate the possibility of education for the deaf and created schools, deaf people gained unprecedented opportunities and moved closer to becoming full citizens. However, in the late 1800s scientific changes and the rise of eugenic beliefs challenged the positive image of sign language and abased it as a primitive language, akin to monkey-like gestures. Deaf people and their language were labeled as inferior. This lasted well into the twentieth century and people believed that deaf individuals were "failures" if they did not "speak" a language. This attitude generally prevailed until the last few decades of the century. Deaf people during this time fought against this prejudice, and also sought ways to preserve their language. As one historian explained:

In an attempt to codify 'the beautiful Sign Language' and to legitimize it to the hearing public, Deaf leaders created several dictionaries. J. Schulyler Long [principal at the Iowa School for the Deaf] published the first one in 1908. /.../ Such uniformity in language, according to Long, promised to increase unity within the Deaf community itself. The dictionary's reception, by Deaf people as well as by their hearing advocates, was immediate and vast.<sup>106</sup>

Many times, when deaf children who were born into a hearing family start attending school, they also start learning sign language. The acquisition of this new, visual language that is so much easier for them to accomplish, compared to reading lips or voicing, that it creates a new world for the deaf individuals and also introduces Deaf culture to them. As Burch states it, through sign language deaf individuals began to claim an identity as a Deaf person. Sign language was also the main reason why differences between the deaf and the hearing were revealed.

In many ways, sign language framed both the perceived and the real differences between this group and mainstream society. Emphasizing the liberating nature of sign

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<sup>106</sup>Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, (New York and London, New York UP, 2002), 55.

language, which allowed unhindered expression of ideas, Deaf people focused not on how they differed but on what they had in common with hearing people. This included the ability to learn, to share ideas and emotions, to work, to marry and raise families - in short to enjoy full and enriched lives. Given unfettered communication, leaders posited, Deaf people were no longer handicapped. /.../ communication differences - and discrimination caused by this - posed the only real obstacle for Deaf people.<sup>107</sup>

Simply put, hearing people, confronted with a different way of communication that they did not understand, discriminated against the deaf. What is needed is a visual approach, the acceptance that the Deaf have an "Eye-Identity" an identity that experiences the world through the eye rather than the ear. Realizing the different perspective helps understanding Deafness better.

Also interesting is the endurance of sign language, a visual language that had been attacked throughout history. Carol Padden in an article about Language survival puts it this way: "In very fundamental ways, languages are collective memories."<sup>108</sup> Some languages struggle with survivals or die out, like Dyrbal and Gaelic. Reasons for a language death are, that the "speakers need a tradition of explanation about the language that helps them organize social forces for remembering it,"<sup>109</sup> if the tradition of explanation is mission, language death can happen But there are other languages, even though only spoken by a minority, that are thriving. As for ASL, "a primary feature in the memory of ASL, one that is perhaps absent in younger-generation Dyrbal and Gaelic, is the community's collective explanation about the central place of the language in their everyday lives. In stories and anecdotes that the group tell about their language, themes of regeneration, preservation and transmission are common currency. Such collectively held explanations can be seen as ways of collectively reminding each new generation of the special circumstances of becoming a native speaker of the language."<sup>110</sup> A collective explanation belongs to a strong identity. This is also true when looking at Spain and the four official languages, Basque, Catalan, Galician and Spanish (Castilian, Andalusian), that go back to strong identities, history and tradition. Those roots give the foundation for a language survival, which also comes true when looking at ASL. As Dorian (1981) notes, "survival of minority languages is, /.../, dependent not on the numbers of speakers but on who is using the language".<sup>111</sup> This again alludes to identity.

Very helpful and supporting for ASL were and still are Deaf social clubs, where the Deaf meet to talk and enjoy community. Even though the status of social clubs has decreased due to new technology it still is a common meeting place for the Deaf and also people interested

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid. 45.

<sup>108</sup>Carol Padden, *Folk Explanation in Language Survival*, In: Lois Bragg, ed., *Deaf World*, (New York and London: New York UP, 2001), 104.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid. 105.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid. 105-106.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid. 108.

in ASL.

Other tools that Deaf used to preserve sign language were films, dictionaries and churches. "The National Association of the Deaf, under the leadership of George Veditz, led the most overtly political and nationally recognized attempt to use film to preserve sign language."<sup>112</sup> In those films master signers were shown mostly telling stories about American patriotism, Deaf history, or religious faith. As Veditz put it in 1913, "They [the Deaf] are facing not a theory but a condition, for they are first, last and all the time the people of the eye".<sup>113</sup>

Also helpful to preserve sign language were the developed dictionaries since they offered written out versions of sign language. And a leading role held the churches who allowed public signing. "For Deaf people in the early twentieth century, church-based events offered a constant link to the broader Deaf community. As Deaf culture within the schools faced the challenge of oralist policies, Deaf churches gained greater influence by promoting cohesion within the community".<sup>114</sup>

A more recent way to preserve sign language was the by Gallaudet University developed traveling social history exhibit. This exhibition was shown for the first time in 2001 and covers two hundred years of US history with the experiences of deaf people. Its name is "History through Deaf Eyes"<sup>115</sup> It is referring to the visual nature of Deaf people's language and their identity. This again alludes to the different perspective, the "Eye-Identity".

## 4.2 Deaf history as a key

History is a very helpful tool to develop an identity because history is a shared experience over time. Deaf History can be seen as a specific issue in creating a Deaf culture. Next to language, Deaf history also functions as a foundation for a Deaf community. An important step of recognizing a subculture is to recognize its history. This is true for the members of a subculture as well as for scholars. Even though the field of Deaf Studies is only twenty years old, it already is very clear, that Deaf culture has a long history.

Deaf communities in the U.S. as well as in Germany have understood those common factors that contribute towards their identity. A foundation for communal identity creates a sense of belonging that has roots and also promotes a sense of legitimacy. A historical foundation also provides evidence of action and behavior over time that fortifies the understanding that Deaf subcultures are not temporary, they have substance and evolve.

In 1988 Padden and Humphries stated: "The isolation and deprivation experienced by

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<sup>112</sup>Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, (New York and London, New York UP, 2002), 57-66.

<sup>113</sup>George Veditz, President, National Association of the Deaf, 1913. In: <http://depts.gallaudet.edu/deafeyes/index.html> (04. March 2006).

<sup>114</sup>Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, (New York and London, New York UP, 2002), 51.

<sup>115</sup><http://depts.gallaudet.edu/deafeyes/index.html> (04. March 2006).

many young deaf children before they discover the language and the culture of Deaf people /.../ allow us to see more clearly the importance of being connected to the past."<sup>116</sup> Through knowing about their past deaf children or children in general for that matter, create their identity. The past helps to understand the present and the future. Therefore the establishment of Deaf history as an academic discipline is a very important key for the self-esteem and the empowerment of the Deaf community.

Deaf people have created various ways to express their history. Some of them are: Folklore, Identifying Geographic Places, and Heroes that represent their history and/or culture, Events, and Education, to only name a few. Folklore includes many things such as: stylized story-telling, through personal performance, theater, or in Deaf films, were master signers retold the heritage and myths of the community. History has also been expressed in other ways. Deaf people have produced art, monuments, small museums, and numerous local history books and articles.

In Deaf history, certain geographic locations have particular historic meaning. One example is Akron, Ohio, where a strong Deaf Community was formed during WW I, due to the hiring of deaf workers by the Goodyear factory. Another place can be seen in the American School for the Deaf in Hartford Connecticut, which was the first permanent school for the deaf, and Gallaudet University in Washington D.C., the first and only liberal arts institution serving primarily deaf and hard of hearing undergraduates.

Deaf subcultures also have heroes, like Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, who established the first school for the Deaf in the US in 1817, and his son, Edward Miner Gallaudet, who followed his father's footsteps and founded Gallaudet College. Likewise, Laurent Clerc, who brought the French Sign Language over from France is celebrated for his leading role in the establishment of the first school for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. Other heroes can be seen in George Veditz, the president of the NAD in the early 1900s who promoted film preservation of sign language and I. King Jordan, the first deaf president of Gallaudet University.<sup>117</sup> Others include Andrew Foster, the first African American that graduated from Gallaudet University and then became a missionary to Africa's Deaf world, as well as Sophia Fowler, wife of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, mother of Edward Minor Gallaudet, and the first matron at Gallaudet College.

Historical events, negative as well as positive, are recognized by Deaf people and further demonstrate their cohesive group identity as a subculture. Some of the "negative" historical events focus on conflict over Deaf people's language and identity. From a Deaf perspective, many of the debates over sign language were really a debate about cultural identity. When mainstream society began to witness Deaf culture in all its manifestations (deaf intermarriage, a separate language etc.), it actively sought to eliminate Deafness.

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<sup>116</sup>Padden, Carol; Humphries, Tom (1988): *DEAF In America: Voices from a culture*, 121.

<sup>117</sup>A new election will be processed this year and it will be interesting to watch the procedure.

One way was to try to force deaf to stop signing and only allow voicing and lip reading as communication. In many schools signing was abandoned. According to the theory of Oralism lip-reading skills and the ability to voice would allow the Deaf to socialize among hearing people, work among them, marry them, in essence "become hearing". One of those attacks on sign language by hearing people can be seen in the Milan Congress of 1880. During this second International Congress on the Education and Welfare of the Deaf, a supermajority of hearing participants voted to use a strict oral approach (speech and lip reading) with their pupils, and attempted to "ban" sign language communication from deaf schools. Educators argued that speech and lip-reading would enable deaf people to better assimilate into society, but Deaf people understood this resolution as a direct assault on their heritage language and their community identity.<sup>118</sup> Inside of schools and after graduation, Deaf people in American and Germany continued to prefer sign language and to associate with other deaf people more than with hearing people.

Another significant example of suffering in Deaf history was the eugenics movement. The rise of eugenics threatened deaf people, who often were labeled "defective" or "deviant", along with the mentally disabled, alcoholics, criminals, and the poor. The term eugenics was formed in 1883 by the British anthropologist Francis Galton who was related to Charles Darwin. Galton's goal was through good breed to enlarge the portion of positive rated hereditarily "superior" people. One of the first exponents of eugenics was Alexander Graham Bell, also known as the founder of the telephone. Between 1882 and 1892 Bell investigated the rise of deafness on the island Martha's Vineyard. In 1883 Bell published the "Memoir", which argued that deaf-deaf marriages caused the spread of more deaf people. Therefore he recommended a bar to marriage between deaf people. Directly attacking Deaf culture, Bell sought to discourage deaf affiliations through oral schools. Although they were never primary targets in eugenic campaigns, it is believed that some deaf people were sterilized, in part because people conflated deafness with mental retardation or mental illness.<sup>119</sup>

In contrast, "positive" event can be seen in the "Deaf President NOW" movement where Deaf people for one week in March, 1988, peacefully closed down Gallaudet University due to the appointing of another hearing President for the University. At the end of the week, a deaf candidate, I. King Jordan, was elected as president.

Deaf history has strong ties to educational history. Deaf education plays an important role

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<sup>118</sup>Developments in the US and in Europe were different. Whereas the impact in the US was limited, in Europe it symbolized a movement that had already taken over. But sign language could not be abandoned wherever Deaf people who were able to sign got together, they signed. It might have been in a more hidden way but it could never be stopped totally. Since language is a cultural value, it is almost impossible to abandon it. Even though sign language did not die out, it took nearly a century before sign language gained favor again in many American schools. This was helped by scholar William Stokoe, who proved in the 1950s and 1960s that American Sign Language is an authentic language and just then a shift of teaching in sign language slowly took place.

<sup>119</sup>A very important work concerning that issue is: Donna F. Ryan, and John S. Schuchman, eds., Deaf People in Hitler's Europe, (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet UP. 2002).

in the understanding of Deaf culture. The founding of deaf schools enabled Deaf culture to begin and flourish. Back in the eighteenth century many Deaf children lived in villages where there were no other Deaf children and therefore were isolated from a Deaf community. The social world of the Deaf extended when more Deaf settled around those schools and more social organizations as clubs were established.<sup>120</sup>

Historian Van Cleve puts it this way:

History has shown that deaf people realize that in community they have strength. If they understand that history and heed its lessons, they will be able to unite, to define their interests again and to preserve their victories, refashioning their objectives and their methods to meet the new conditions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>121</sup>

Alumni associations from schools also fostered long-standing ties between deaf people, and educators of the deaf often served as political advocates for this subcultural group. For Deaf people everywhere, educational opportunities have strongly affected their ability to express their Deaf identity. It is not surprising that Deaf culture is particularly strong in America, where Gallaudet University, has helped promote a strong elite cadre of Deaf people since 1864.

Gallaudet University also served as the location for the first "Deaf Way" International Conference and Festival, which took place the week of July 9-14, 1989. There, hundreds of Deaf people from around the world gathered to celebrate international Deaf culture and heritage.

### **4.3 Identity: The key for recognition**

Identity comes from the Latin word "identitas" which means consubstantiality and describes rather the identity of a living being or a thing, with itself. Social psychology looks at identity as the sum of criteria which distinguishes us from others. This identity also allows an explicit identification from a physiological standpoint. In a philosophical or mathematical way identity stands for the same amount of arithmetic or linguistic expressions. The identity of a human being can be seen in the fact that one person is distinguishable from another person and that a person can still be identified as the same person, when it changes (e.g. the hair cut or color change, but the person can still be identified because of other issues as the eyes or characteristics). One needs to distinguish the psychological identity which is a concept that acts on the assumption that a human being identifies itself with an outer attribute or a group. The psychological identity established through group membership (family, nation,

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<sup>120</sup>Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, DEAF In America: Voices from a culture. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988), 4-6 and 30.

<sup>121</sup>John Vickrey van Cleve and Barry A. Crouch, A Place of Their Own (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), 171.

and friends) and social roles. But not only the "we" is important, in western cultures also the "I", the experience of uniqueness, plays an important role. The requirement to gain a stable identity lays in the parents' house were from early on, through family interactions, children create their own identity.<sup>122</sup>

A widely spread distinction splits identity into two aspects, the personal identity and the social identity. The personal identity is the result of individual experiences. But identity cannot be understood as an ability that one acquires and inhibits. It is an ongoing development that changes depending on social interactions and communication. It is always socially transmitted. The social identity means, that individuals feel a belonging to a certain group. The "I-Identity" means, that a human is able to find a balance between the personal identity (his own morals, norms, needs) and the social identity (role expectation). The two extremes of someone that did not find this balance would be acclimatization; an individual fails to develop a personal identity and identifies with other persons values. The other extreme would be if someone ignores the behavior expectation of others totally, and isolation will be following.<sup>123</sup>

The sociologist Lothar Krappmann states that identity is transmitted through language. For him, identity is only possible through communication of an individual with his surrounding fellows and emerges new in every situation. That means identity is not a fixed stadium rather than an ongoing change from situation to situation. The establishment of an individual identity therefore is the result of many interactions that were combined with each other and created an identity.<sup>124</sup>

George Herbert Mead is convinced that the identity of a person develops out of social interactions through language. The development of an individual Identity therefore is depending on the social interactions of each individual with other individuals. That can happen through language and other ways of communication as gestures and mimic. But only an extract of the whole identity is visible to one another. The core identity is split up into various identities. Which identity will be revealed depends on the societal process the individual is in. This certain identity might otherwise not be there, it reveals only in this special situation. Mead suggests that the different elementary identities combined create the full identity of a human being. A condition for the development of an identity is the existence of self-confidence of a human being.<sup>125</sup> As for the Deaf, their identity is very much based on their sign language, a language that offers them communication and also expresses their "Eye-Identity". The Deaf are gaining self-confidence through a strong "we" identity in the

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<sup>122</sup>Bernd Ahrbeck, *Gehörlosigkeit und Identität*, 2. überarbeitete Auflage, (1997), 118; In: Mark Zaurov, *Gehörlose Juden: Eine doppelte Minderheit*, (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 28.

<sup>123</sup>Anette Barth, *Zum Begriff der Identität*. In: Studiengang Öffentlichkeitsarbeit Band 5: Planung der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit. 3. vollst. Überarbeitete und erw. Auflage, (Frankfurt/Main; Gemeinschaftswerk der Evangelischen Publizistik e.V., 1999).

<sup>124</sup><http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identit%C3%A4t> (24. October 2005).

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

Deaf Community but still the Deaf also have to find out their "I-Identity".

## 5 Empirical Study

To better understand and demonstrate that Deaf are a subculture, this thesis includes a survey about the identity of Deaf people. Is the Deaf community a minority group defined through the same language or is it a group labeled after a limitation? Or are they both, a minority and a subculture? Those are questions I have discussed and partly answered in the first five chapters. In this chapter now, I analyze a survey among the Deaf themselves.

For this survey the questionnaire that can be found in the appendix, was published online on the German website: <http://www.taubenschlag.de>. Therefore mostly German deaf individuals participated but also people who were born in other countries but live in Germany now or have knowledge of German and visited [www.taubenschlag.de](http://www.taubenschlag.de).

To demonstrate Deaf cultural identity, the Deaf need to be included in this thesis. Therefore this empirical study should help to find out more about the Deaf society and if they see themselves as a separate cultural group.

More than sixty deaf individuals participated in this survey and through their answers, especially to open questions, common traits in Deaf Communities might be revealed. Those questionnaires should clarify if the Deaf, according to Schwendter's categories can be called a subculture and if they understand themselves as one as well. So far it is clear, that deaf individuals do identify as a separate and distinct cultural group. This became clear during a presentation on Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 at Gallaudet University. There some people of the Deaf audience also did point out that they do not understand why they are a subculture and not a culture.<sup>126</sup> That question is already answered in the above chapters. Also interesting to analyze will be, if sign language is the primary language of the participating Deaf.

### 5.1 Method of study

The method of this survey is a questionnaire with open and closed questions among the Deaf society that visited the German website for the Deaf: [www.taubenschlag.de](http://www.taubenschlag.de). Almost all questionnaires were filled out by people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The questionnaire contains thirty eight questions. About one third of the questions are open questions but some of them are follow up questions asking for reasons of the choice they made at the prior question (see e.g. questions 30, 31, 32). The first three questions (the first part) are demographic questions about the participant, the subject's gender, age, and origin. In the second part, the following eighteen questions (questions No. 4-21) are mostly about their hearing status, their family (if there are more family members that are deaf) and other questions concerning their social surroundings, communication abilities and relationships. The third part (questions 22-38) mostly focuses on cultural values. The

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<sup>126</sup>Please find attached DVD with the presentation in the appendix.

participants understanding of culture, things they do in their free time, certain hobbies and habits and if their social outlets are considered. The latter also includes questions about broader identity issues, like how they meet other Deaf people, what kind of school they attended, if they are a member of any organizations or clubs or if they have subscribed any newspapers or magazines.

## **5.2 The procedure**

Since the numbers of deaf people in Germany are small<sup>127</sup> and they are spread all over Germany a method to use the questionnaire that is regardless of location was, necessary. Therefore, on January 30<sup>st</sup> 2006 a link to the questionnaire was published on the front page of <http://www.taubenschlag.de>. There participants could fill out the questionnaire and send it directly via email to the author of this paper. Within three weeks sixty three deaf individuals have participated and their questionnaires will be used for evaluation in this paper. I want to thank all participants that have taken the time to fill out the questionnaire and share their information. The data<sup>128</sup> has been entered into an Excel sheet and graphics with the results of the closed questions will be included in this evaluation. Next to that selected answers of the open questions or tendencies of common answers will be represented. Before representing the information from the evaluation it should be mentioned that through this method of an online, written questionnaire, all individuals who do not have internet access and/or are not capable of reading were excluded.

### **5.2.1 Part one: Demographic information of the participants**

The genders of the participants were 23 males and 38 females. Two of the probands did not provide any information concerning their gender (see fig. 3 in the appendix). The majority of the participants is between 25 and 34 years old, 46.03%. Only 14.29% are younger than 25 years, 20.64% are between 35 and 44 years old, 6.35% are between 45 and 54 years old and 12.70% are 55 years or older (see fig. 4). Most of the participants were born in Germany. Only five of the individuals were born outside of Germany, in France, Greece, Czech republic, Austria and Switzerland. Two participants did not provide any information concerning their origin.

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<sup>127</sup> Approximately 0.1% -> 85.000 Germans are deaf.

<sup>128</sup> All data (the received questionnaires data and an excel sheet) can be found on the attached CD in the appendix.

### 5.2.2 Part two: Identifying issues

Most people that answered the questionnaire refer to themselves as "gehörlos"<sup>129</sup>, 50.79%. Less than half of that, 23.81%, call themselves hard of hearing, 14.29% deaf, 4.76% hearing impaired and 3.18% as not hearing or as none of those options (see fig. 5). How far the chosen hearing status and the essential hearing status differ cannot be proved. It needs to be mentioned that there exists a smooth transition between those different statuses. Most of the participants were born deaf, 69.8%, only 22.22% became deaf before they turned five and 4.76% became deaf after the age of five (see fig. 6). More than one third, 38.10%, do not know the cause of their deafness. Almost one third, 31.75% became deaf because of a sickness, 22.22% said it is genetic and 7.94% of the participants lost their hearing because of an accident (see fig. 7). As it is also said in literature about the deaf, 65.08% of the deaf do not have any deaf relatives. Of the other 34.92% who do have deaf relatives most are close relatives, their father (27.27%), their mother (22.72%) or their siblings (22.72%) (see fig. 8 and 9).

The majority of the participants has hearing parents (57 out of 63) and 82.46% of the hearing parents do not speak sign language (see fig. 10). Those results also reflect existing data that points toward communication problems within hearing families with deaf children. Those children start learning sign language later in life, when they start going to a deaf school or meet other deaf children. The parents who do speak sign language mostly learned it in school or while taking classes (adult evening classes, university). Others learned it from friends, relatives, at the sport club or through self study. One participant pointed out, that they do not support sign language rather than sign endorsed communication (lautsprachbegleitende Gebärden) because in their opinion it makes an integration into society easier. Almost all of the participants (90.48%) at some point in life had some oral or lip reading training, but only 70.18% use those skills regularly. Sign language is used to communicate (90.48%) (see fig. 11, 12 and 13).

As most challenging situations were mentioned encounters with hearing people e.g. while doing an apprenticeship or studying at the university as the only deaf person among hearing individuals. One participant added to that, that there was a lack of interpreters and the interpreters partly had to be financed privately which led to the derogation of the studies. Others experienced the bilingualism as a challenge, to learn sign language and written language. Also challenging for some are hearing people who think, that deaf people live an inferior or low grade life. One mother experienced the fear of not being able to hear her sleeping daughter as challenge. Also not very deaf friendly and therefore challenging are e.g. loud speaker announcements at train stations without supplying the voiced information

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<sup>129</sup>Interpreted as "Deaf", in Germany there is no clear distinction between deaf and Deaf. There might as well be the same different understandings but they are not yet expressed with different words or capitalization of a letter.

on a display. Another participant mentioned a car accident that he had caused at work. One deaf individual pointed out the following:

Die Hör- und Spracherziehung, die mir wenig gebracht hat und mich sehr frustriert hat, auch das sehr unrealistische Weltbild von Pädagogen der Gehörlosenschule mir vermittelt hat, dass die Hörenden mich dann gut verstehen können, was gar nicht gestimmt hat. Weiterhin die Hörenden, die sich so blöd mir gegenüber verhalten, wenn ich sie z.B. um ein Stift und Zettel zur schriftlichen Verständigung bitte und ganz deutlich die Gebärden dafür zeige. In England und USA wissen sie sofort Bescheid mit schriftl. Verständigung, ich brauche nicht so umständlich zu erklären.<sup>130</sup>

This comment alludes to the conflicts between the oralist view and the deaf reality. The second part of the citation raises the question if hearing people in England and the US are more capable of sign language or if better understandings of deafness and communication barriers exist.

The most intense question of this questionnaire might have been, to ask about the option of regaining hearing through surgery. But the tendency was very clear, 79.37% clearly stated, that an operation would not be an option for them. For some there was no option of a surgery since their deafness is not "repairable".<sup>131</sup> Others are satisfied with their Deaf identity. Only 15.87% could imagine to have surgery and 4.76% did not answer this question at all (see fig. 14). But there have also been comments were people, who already have a cochlear implant, are very happy with their decision.<sup>132</sup>

The answers to the questions concerning relationships are at an average. The majority (76.19%) is in a romantic relation ship (see fig. 15). Most of the partners are deaf as well (69.84%) (see fig. 16). And most of them (49.21%) want to have children or have children already (39.68%) (see fig. 17). When answering question number twenty one about the hearing status they want their children to have. The answers were very mixed. Most participants (36.51%) did answer that for them the hearing status of their child does not matter. A little over one third (34.92%) would like to have hearing children due to easier

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<sup>130</sup>Transl. by author: "The voice and hearing training, which did not accommodate much and caused frustration, also the unrealistic world view that pedagogues of the deaf school communicated, that the hearing would understand me better if I can voice, which was not true. Furthermore, the hearing who acted foolish when I e.g. asked for a piece of paper and a pen for written communication and I clearly showed the signs for that. In England and the USA the hearing know right away what to do and I do not have to make complicated explanations."

<sup>131</sup>"Ich bin gehoerlos gewohnt und fuehle nicht behindert. Wenn Dolmetscher da kein Problem oder wenn Hoerende Muehe geben, kein Problem. Politik und Menschen muessen etwas umdenken dann klappt ja alles besser. Jetzt schon viel besser als frueher!!! CI macht mich auch nicht 100% gesund /.../". Transl. by author: "I am used to be deaf and I don't feel disabled. If there is a interpreter, than it is no problem or if the hearing are at pains, it is no problem. Politics and humans need to rethink a little than everything works out better. Nowadays it already is much better than in the past!!! CI would not make me 100% healthy /.../."

<sup>132</sup>"Ich bin beidseitig CI-versorgt. Es war die beste Entscheidung meines Lebens." Transl. by author: "I have a CI on both sides. That was the best decision of my life."

communication and socialization<sup>133</sup> and 28.57% would like to have deaf children (see fig. 18). Some participants were torn:

It is a difficult question. I can't really decide because on one hand there would not be identity difficulties for the child if it is deaf, on the other hand it might be the case, that it will receive bad education in the deaf school. In this case a hearing child would have a better stand. It has more choices to what kind of school it wants to go. Deep inside I would like to have a deaf child because it would create a stronger family bond due to communication.

Other participants were more radical and stated that they do not want to have a child with a disability, they want children who can live in a normal society which is the hearing world.<sup>134</sup> Some do have realized, that the disadvantages for hearing impaired individuals are decreasing, but in Germany there are still many areas like television, school and further education where deaf are still disadvantaged. The school level and the expectances at deaf schools are miserable, the rate of close captioning on television is too low and the costs for an interpreter are not always covered.<sup>135</sup>

As one can see within those mixed answers, it is a personal conflict. Even though the majority does not care about the hearing status rather than to have healthy children, many participants would like to have a child that would be like them. In their opinion a deaf child would fully understand them, but they do realize that life as a deaf person in the hearing world is not always easy. Also having a hearing child would offer them a bridge to the hearing world because while growing up bilingual, knowing sign language and oral language, it could function as interpreter.<sup>136</sup>

### **5.2.3 Part three: Integration issues**

This part of the questionnaire included questions that deal with integration issues and the connections between the hearing and the deaf world. While describing the Deaf community many different answers were given. Factitious and rather neutral answers like "small"; "silent world" or "very different" were few. Most of the participants gave positive terms like: "German Sign Language", "Culture", "identity improving", "necessary for living", "funny", "open", "bilingual", "strong", "exciting", and "big family". Only a few described the Deaf

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<sup>133</sup>"Die Kommunikation ist leichter, man findet schneller Freunde, man ist nicht so einsam."

Transl. by author: "Communication is easier, friendships are made faster, one is less lonely."

<sup>134</sup>"Weil ich möchte, dass sie nicht behindert sind, sie sollen in einer normalen Gesellschaft leben und das ist die 'hörende Welt'."

<sup>135</sup>Die Benachteiligung Hörgeschädigter ist zwar besser geworden, aber in vielen Bereichen (Fernsehen, Schule, Ausbildung) immer noch sehr groß. Um ein paar Beispiele zu nennen: Unterrichtsniveau und Erwartungshaltung an GL-Schulen ist miserabel, Untertitelquote zu gering, Dolmetscherkosten werden nicht immer übernommen.

<sup>136</sup>"Zum Dolmetschen unterstützen" Transl. by author: "Help interpret"

community with rather negative terms like: "lonely", "narrow minded", "difficult world", "torn" or "isolated". All in all it can be said, that the Deaf see the Deaf community as something positive.

The majority of the participants visited a residential school (68.25%), one fifth (20.64%) marked "other". The reason for that could be that they visited more than one school during their education but the questionnaire only gave the option of marking one school form. Only 6.35% went to a public school and 4.76% to a mainstream program (see fig. 19). For 55.56% their circle of friends contains mostly deaf individuals, 39.68% have deaf and hearing friends and 4.76% have mostly hearing friends (see fig. 20).

The participants have various hobbies. Noticeable was the interest to read, to travel, to do sport and working on the computer. Surprisingly it is not the internet where the deaf mostly get to know each other. It still is more or less like it used to be in Deaf clubs a few decades ago, face to face encounters. Common meeting places nowadays are schools, organizations and clubs, or events. Also the introduction through friends brings the Deaf together. Organizations or clubs can also be seen as famous places, when looking at the numbers of members. The majority of 69.84% holds a membership at some institution. Only 26.98% are not a member of an organization or club (see fig. 21). Most participants are members in regional or national deaf organizations or clubs. Next to that many are a member of a deaf sports club or a specialized club for certain interests (e.g. motorbike, religious orientation (catholic, protestant), academics, the Alps, history, culture). Reasons why participants are not a member of a club or an organization mostly are that they do not have time, that they are simply not interested or that there is nothing close by to where they live. Others are not happy with the members of a certain club or do not like the intolerance of some deaf or they were embarrassed to be part of a deaf organization.

Question number thirty, if they subscribe any paper or magazine, was mostly answered with "yes". Two thirds of the participants have subscribed a newspaper or a magazine (see fig. 22). More than thirty different papers have been mentioned but the ones mentioned often were national or regional Deaf papers (15), the magazine P.M. (6), "Das Zeichen" (5) and "Lesen statt hören" (4). Only the magazine P.M. is not specifically addressed to the Deaf community. It is a popular science magazine with articles from different areas concerning science, technology or society. Reasons for not subscribing any paper or magazine were that it is too expensive, that participants read the paper at work or most people get their news and information from the internet. That goes along with the fact, that 96.83% of the participants use the internet as their main communication device. Four participants called the internet the only device that they use. That shows the importance of the new developed technology that is not only famous among the Deaf but influences their life in a different way. Second most used device is the cell phone. More than 85% use a cell phone, many along with other devices. Pagers and Blackberries are not very common.

Question number thirty four was similar to question number twenty two asking about Deaf culture or the Deaf community, therefore many answers were repetitive. Still a few answers were outstanding. One participant pointed out, that Deaf culture is not known and another wrote that Deaf Culture in Germany is underdeveloped.

Most of the participants (61.90%) see themselves as part of a Deaf society (community), 36.51% understand themselves as a language minority and 26.98% can accept the term subculture. Only 17.46% see themselves as part of a group with the same disability. That was not surprising since the discussion if the deaf are disabled is very common and diverse.

When asking about the project Laurent, South Dakota, only 39.68% knew of it. More than 50% did not know what Laurent, SD stands for (see fig. 23). The ones who did know what is been planned in South Dakota, were mostly negative about it, only four participants liked the idea and could imagine to live there. The majority thinks it is an interesting idea but they cannot imagine, for various reasons, to live there. They said, they do need and want the hearing world around and that this kind of project might be realizable in the U.S. but not in today's Germany. One person clearly stated that it can not imagine that this project will make an approach between the deaf and hearing towards each other easier rather than making the hearing people think that the deaf prefer to be among themselves.

The last question, what the society or politics need to do to improve the cooperation between the hearing and the deaf was manifold but certain main issues were revealed. Mostly mentioned were language related issues. According to the participants, deaf education should be bilingual and the education should be on the same level as the education in public schools for hearing children. That would include teachers who teach at schools for the deaf need to be able to sign and understand sign language. According to the participants the German sign language, since it is an official language in Germany now, should be accepted as foreign language so that more hearing people might be interested in learning it or at least know about it and at the same time the education of interpreters should be supported because there is a lack of interpreters. Also having an interpreter should officially be supported because in various cases the deaf in Germany have to pay an interpreter out of their own pocket. In many of those issues the USA function as an example and Deaf Germans would like to achieve the same rights as the Deaf in the U.S. have achieved already. Another important issue is the enlightenment of the German society. Schools should, from early grades on, clarify more the facts concerning deafness and other disabilities. Subjects like "Sozialkunde"<sup>137</sup> should include discussions about the Deaf, equal rights and Sign language. Also the media should cover that issue more often to endorse the enlightenment of the society. Sign language should especially be better known in public institutions that have to serve deaf individuals. Also public spaces should be developed according to the needs of disabled. That includes e.g. train stations which supply much information via loudspeakers. They should also have that

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<sup>137</sup>Transl. by author: Social Studies

information available on screens. Next to enlighten the general public also the specialists like doctors should offer broader information when talking to affected families. Next to their medical, mostly physical advice they should be able to introduce other solutions that include the existing Deaf culture. The Deaf should be included into the decision making processes. The participants also stated that the Deaf should be braver and both sides hearing and Deaf should be more tolerant. But there were also less encouraging comments like the following: "Haha, das ist Spaß, oder? Ich hab die Hoffnung auf Verständnis/Bemühen miteinander schon lange aufgegeben."<sup>138</sup> Those comments show that a progressive culture always also has to deal with disappointment but the majority does look up to countries like the U.S. that gives them hope that it is worth to be progressive..

### **5.3 Conclusion of the study**

This study has proved that the Deaf Culture in Germany is developing but still ranks way after countries like the U.S. Even though Germany had to face more Oralism, Sign Language is the primary language of the Deaf in Germany. More than 90% of the participants call Sign Language their language.

It was interesting to find out, that most of the German Deaf see themselves as a Deaf society and that the term "subculture" was only chosen by a little over 25%. This raises the questions if it is helpful to use a subcultural approach to introduce the Deaf into broader academic fields and what the reason are that the Deaf do not see themselves as a subculture. All in all it can be said that the Deaf have accepted their deafness and try to get involved in the hearing world. They do understand that the hearing world is necessary, which became very clear when looking at the answers concerning Laurent, SD, but also they also know that the Deaf Community is unique and important for them.

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<sup>138</sup>Transl. by author: Haha, are you kidding? I have given up the hope of understanding and endeavor with each other a long time ago."

## 6 Conclusion

This paper clearly proves that the Deaf community can not only be called a culture but a unique subculture due to their minority status. The theoretical approach contributes to broader concepts of culture and identity. A new theoretical understanding of Deafness helps to expand the traditional view of culture. The theoretical approach not only proves the Deaf as a subculture, it also provides tools to integrate this subculture into broader discussions.

While studying the Deaf culture I was trying to find a term that describes their subculture best. The term that developed while thinking about the Deaf community is that the Deaf subculture is a "caused eternal subculture". That means:

People who are deaf did not choose to be deaf; they are deaf because of different reasons like an illness, family genetics or accidents. A deaf person most of the time cannot change the physical condition, even though technical methods and medical surgeries try to gain back hearing and have improved. But the natural hearing will never be achieved. What the deaf can choose is how to communicate and with whom they communicate, which leads away from the biological towards the cultural aspect. To be part of the Deaf community mostly is a choice since only 10% of the born deaf are born to Deaf parents which many times means they are born into the Deaf culture because they grow up in it. Once decided to belong to the Deaf community it is a choice for life, it is eternal.

Other subcultures for example hippies or skaters chose to be what they are, due to a certain passion or interest they share with other people. Their belonging to a subculture has nothing to do with their physical abilities and only last for a limited amount of time.

The time someone is deaf is not limited compared to e.g. the youth subculture which is limited by age or circumstances (being in high school). Being deaf is eternal, but here as well, deaf people have a choice. They can choose to participate in the hearing world or not, or to get a hearing aid or not.

The Deaf are more than a minority group they are a subculture due to certain cultural issues that form their identity. What the Deaf subculture still needs is public recognition for a better understanding of their subculture. People who do not understand what being deaf means need to stop to feel sorry and only see deafness as a disability.<sup>139</sup> It is more a limitation than a disability. This is very important when it comes to the point of advising hearing parents who have a deaf child and feel overextended. Many doctors and psychologists still try to convince parents of deaf children that the best way is to integrate their deaf child into the dominant society. Since the parents trust the doctors and do not know much about other options or that a Deaf culture exists, they make decisions which might not be the best way but for them the easiest or the most logical. Meaning, considering a different option would

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<sup>139</sup>For more information see: Catherine J. Kudlick, *Disability History: Why We Need Another "Other"*, In: *American Historical Review*, June 2003, 763-793.

be to accept the deafness, but that would go along with learning about it and also learning the cultural codes e.g. learning to sign. Many parents are not willing to do that and also are not introduced to the options and the possibilities the Deaf community has to offer nowadays. But the need to change the society from a medical view toward a socio-anthropological view remains. What deaf people need is respect and not hearing people who try to change the way they are. The question might arise if the government of certain countries knows the meaning of Deafness and not only that deafness exist. The ideal governmental goal would be basic signing education for everyone to enable communication between the people of one nation. Looking at the USA again one can see a mayor difference compared to Germany. American Sign Language already climbed up from fourth to the third most spoken language in the US after English and Spanish, an achievement German Sign Language (DGS) currently deaf Germans can only dream of. Even though Germans are known for quite good foreign language skills, they have little knowledge about, or few chances to learn, a language that would allow them to communicate with their own people, although admittedly it is only a small group of the population. Many Germans would be able to communicate in English if necessary. That should be the same goal for the basics of DGS. Compared to the U.S. on that matter, the percentage of deaf population is almost equal around 0.1%. How a country integrates various subcultures also shapes the image of that country.

The Deaf community needs to be included into public issues but also into more academic fields of study. To include Deaf studies into the field of social studies, e.g. Cultural Studies, general History or Political Sciences and not only develop their own academic field namely Deaf Studies could also be very helpful for a better public recognition. In return Deaf Studies can contribute fundamental knowledge and understanding about Deafness which does not focus on the physical and medical discussion of deafness rather on the cultural variant that this subculture has to offer. The deaf community tries to make their standpoints public in many ways already, through world congresses, online with their own websites, their separate magazines, their own schools and now even their own city which is being planned in South Dakota.<sup>140</sup> But the discussion needs to be included into the regular academic discussion. The Deaf need to be mentioned along with other minority groups or the well known labels like: race, gender, ethnicity or class.

What we are facing right now is an ongoing fundamental violation of human rights. This could be clearly seen in the example of Junius Wilson in chapter 3.4, where a black, deaf, working class men, was mistreated and misjudged and had to live a life that otherwise might have been very different. Even though there have been passed certain laws to make things easier and try to integrate deaf people (or any other minority group for that matter) which is a big step already, actions need to follow. Just giving someone a right to do something is not enough to gain a better understanding. Just the recent discussion between the German

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<sup>140</sup>Check: <http://www.laurentsd.com>

television stations to have the chancellor debate interpreted for the deaf showed, that e.g. economy should not be allowed to stand in the way of a better public recognition, integration, and understanding.<sup>141</sup>

The question that is left open is: Why is the procedure still so slow? One very important reason might be the separations and many different opinions within the Deaf community itself. About the "right" way of communication (only signing, or also voicing), the whole debate about the Cochlear Implant, etc. all this will make it more complicated to solve the problem.

Gallaudet University just had its annual "Enrichment Day" in October 2005. One thing they talked about were the communication rules on Campus because there are still many hearing employees on Campus which still do not sign very well even though sign language has been agreed on to be the language on Campus for all, hearing, hard of hearing and deaf. That shows that passing a law is not enough.

Another reason might be the fact of being a minority and having a dominant hearing majority which still makes most of today's decisions concerning the Deaf.

As for my personal experience while researching at Gallaudet University I can say that trying to get to know and understand a different culture or subculture is like a crossword puzzle. One will get, through reading watching and experiencing a frame, an outline of a picture but in the beginning there are many empty spots and questions. But throughout time some of the empty spots get filled with meaning and understanding. But as someone from a different culture, one might never fully understand. There might be different levels of understanding and one person might get closer than another to the full understanding. It is the same with learning another oral language next to the mother tongue it will never be the same. One might become fluent but still an accent will be heard. (There might be a few exceptions). This means there will always be some kind of misunderstanding and if we want to understand each other we need to cooperate with the ones who know best, in this case, the Deaf themselves.

However, there is ample evidence that demonstrates Deaf are a subculture in both Germany and the U.S. Scholars need to recognize Deaf along with other subcultures, if we are to truly understand who we, as people are, and have been.

As a hearing person I can only agree with Padden and Humphries who said: "Studying the culture of Deaf people provides an interesting perspective on culture in general and on the relationship between human beings and the properties of their culture."<sup>142</sup>

In the end I can only relate to Baruch Spinoza who said:

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<sup>141</sup>See: <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1518,372230,00.html> (01. September 2005).

<sup>142</sup>Padden, Carol; Humphries, Tom. DEAF In America: Voices from a culture. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 120-121.

Ich habe mich nach Kräften bemüht, des Menschen Tun weder zu belachen, noch zu beweinen, noch zu verabscheuen, sondern es zu begreifen.<sup>143</sup>

Understanding and/or accepting Deafness as a subculture does not mean to interpret everything into sign language rather than to incorporate subculture in developing new methods of integration.

According to the humanistic standpoint every life is worth living and who has the right to decide or label between worthy and unworthy?

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<sup>143</sup>Spinoza, Baruch, Tractatus politicus I, §4. In: Girtler, Roland. Randkulturen: Theorie der Unanständigkeit. Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau, 1996. Vorwort. Transl. by author: I tried with all my strength to not laugh about the human doings, nor to cry about it, nor to abhor it, but to understand it.

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- ▷ <http://www.google.de/search?hl=de&q=deaf+subculture&btnG=meta=suche> (22. November 2005)
- ▷ <http://www.handspeak.com/tour/byte/index-ref.php?byte=signhistory> (23. January 2006)
- ▷ <http://www.laurentsd.com> (04. October 2005)
- ▷ <http://www.laurentsd.com/PDF/LaurentConceptPaper.pdf>  
(03. December 2005)
- ▷ <http://www.lingsnrw.de/>
- ▷ <http://www.samuel-heinicke-schule-leipzig.de/>
- ▷ <http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/>
- ▷ <http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/bibweb/F-Description.html>  
(18. January 2006)
- ▷ <http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/signum/zeichen/>  
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- ▷ <http://www.spiegel.de/Kultur/Gesellschaft/0,1518,372230,00.html> (09. January 2005)
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- ▷ <http://www.taubenschlag.de>
- ▷ <http://www.teachersparadise.com/ency/en/wikipedia/d/de/deaf.html> (31. October 2005)
- ▷ [http://www.tvcom/sesame-street/show/887/summary.html&full\\_summary=1](http://www.tvcom/sesame-street/show/887/summary.html&full_summary=1) (26. December 2005)
- ▷ [http://www.wfdcongress.org/intro/wfdcongress\\_content.php](http://www.wfdcongress.org/intro/wfdcongress_content.php) (26. December 2005)
- ▷ <http://www.wikipedia.com>

## A Figures

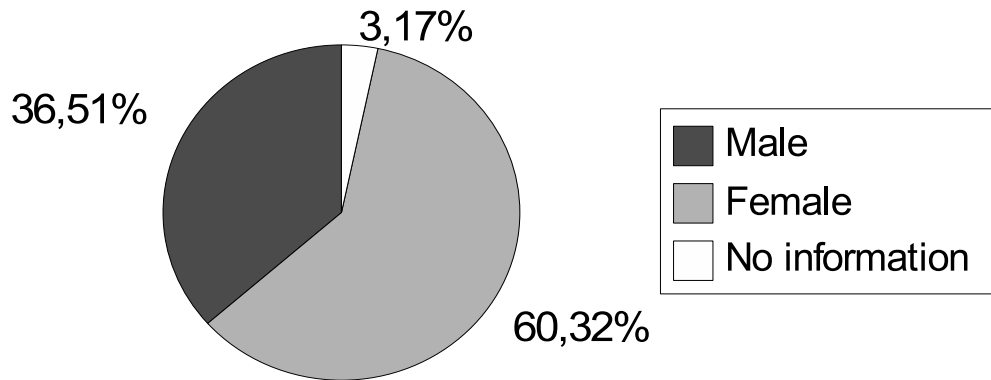


Figure 3: Gender of the participants

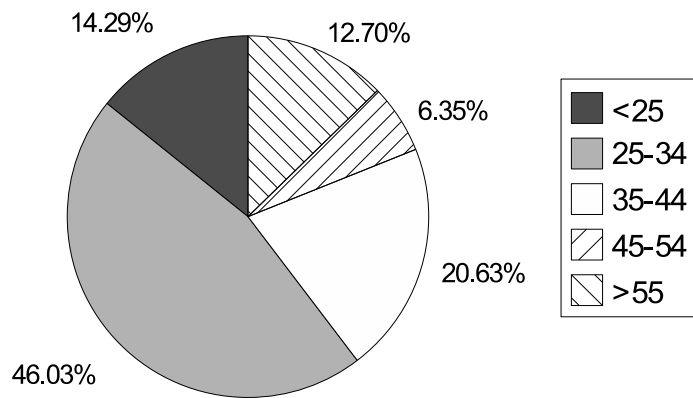


Figure 4: Age of the participants

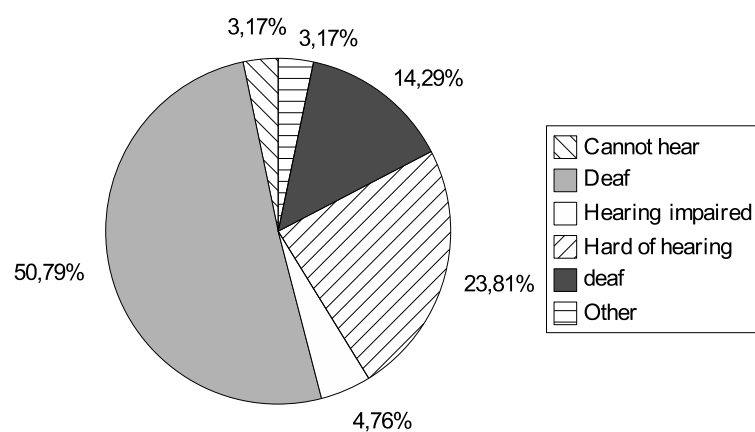


Figure 5: Hearing status of participants

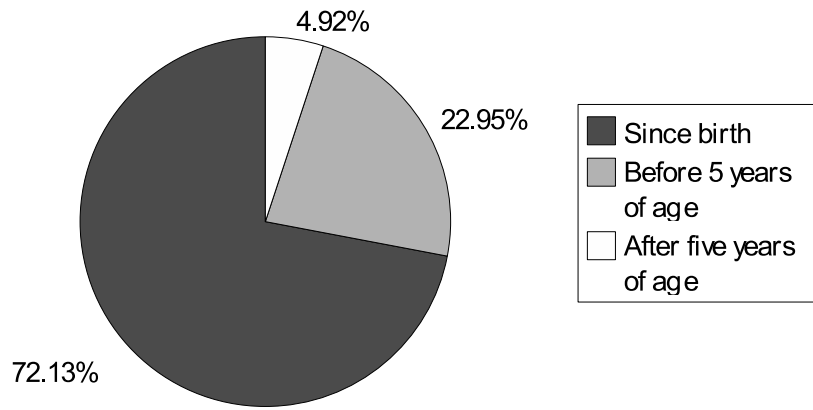


Figure 6: Age when lost hearing

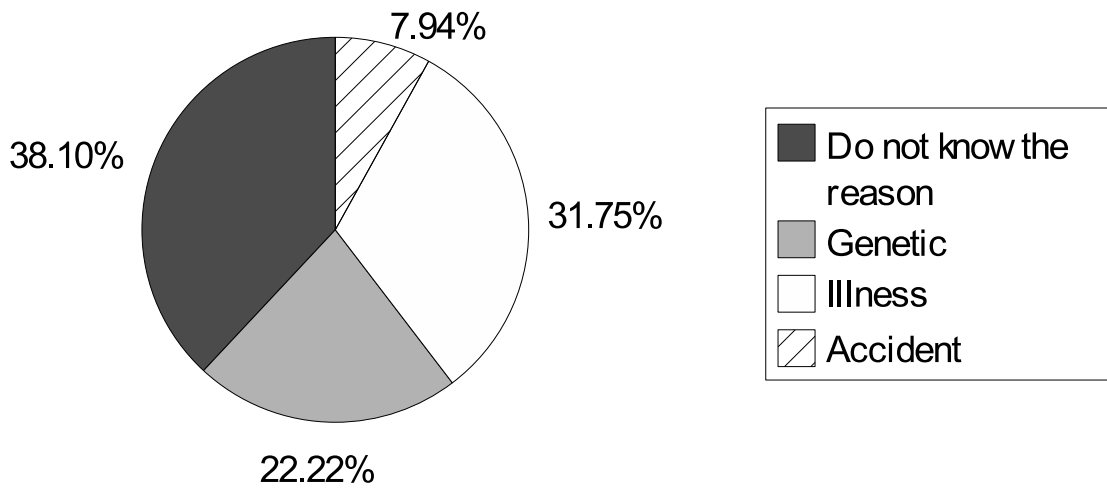


Figure 7: Reasons for hearing loss

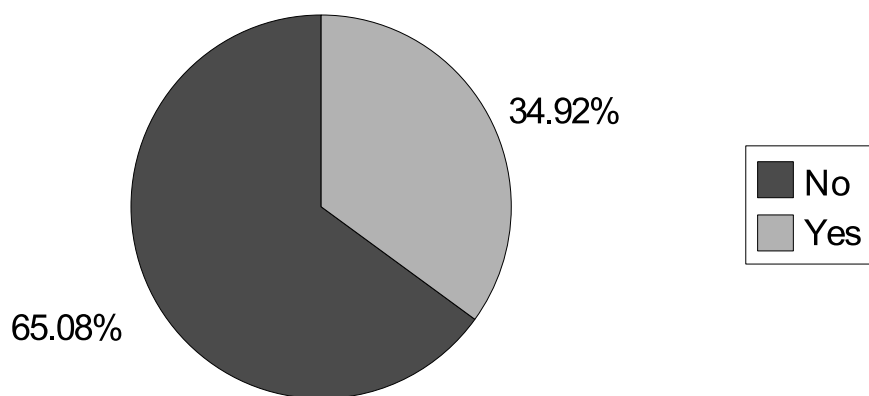


Figure 8: Having deaf relatives

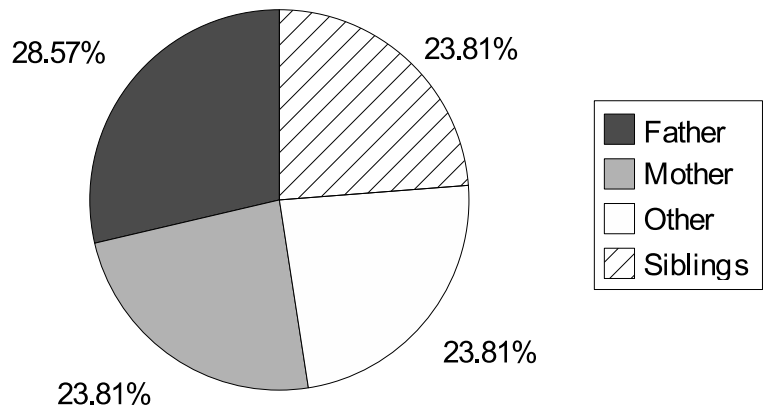


Figure 9: Distribution of deaf relatives

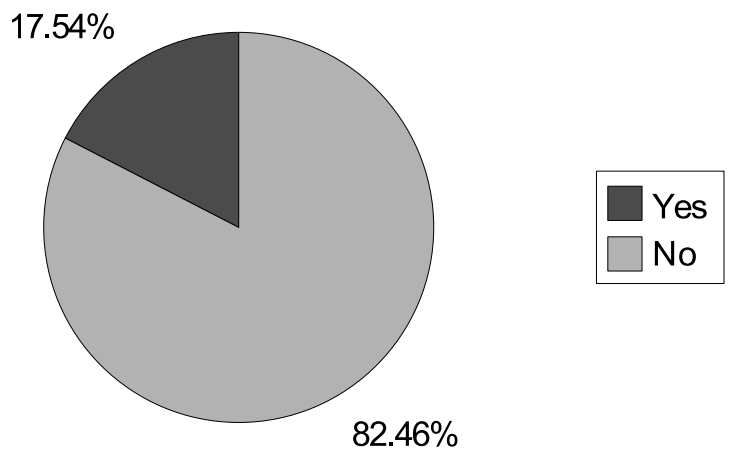


Figure 10: Signing skills of hearing parents

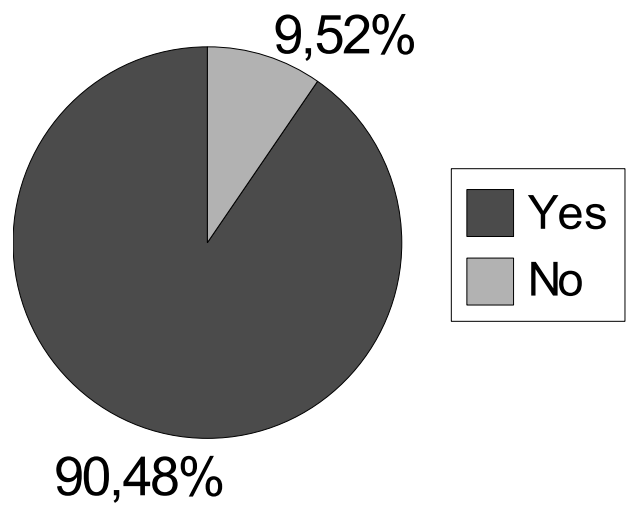


Figure 11: Participants received lip reading or speech training

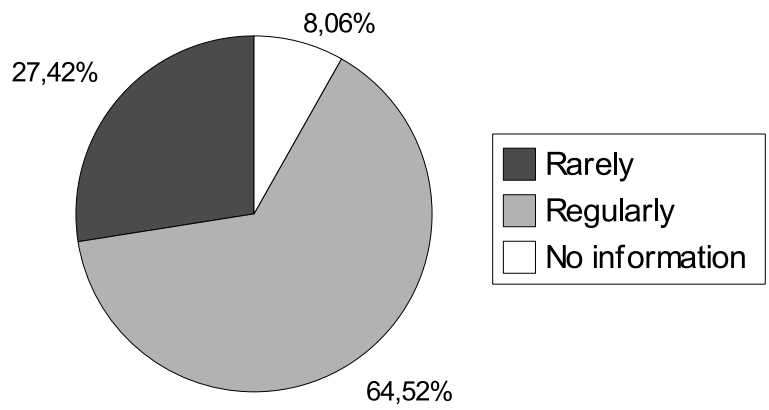


Figure 12: Usage of lip reading or voicing skills

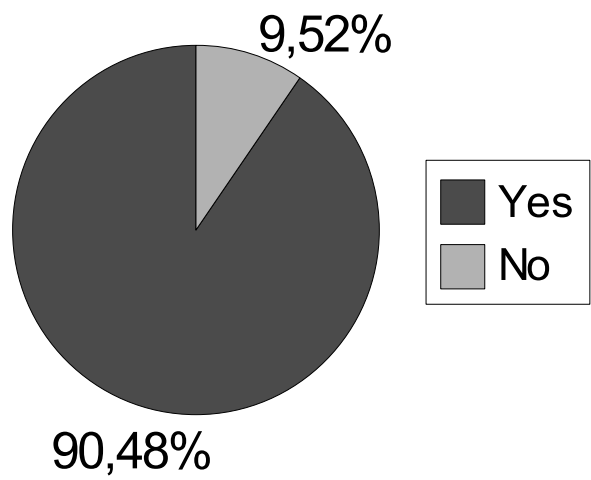


Figure 13: Use sign language to communicate

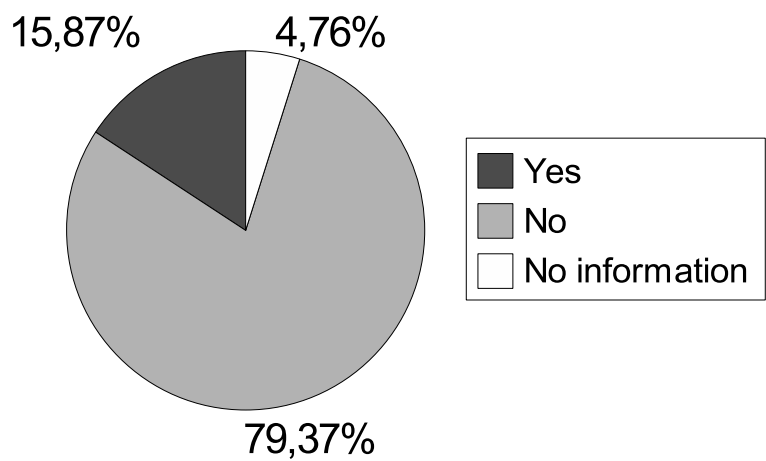


Figure 14: Willingness to undergo a surgery to regain hearing

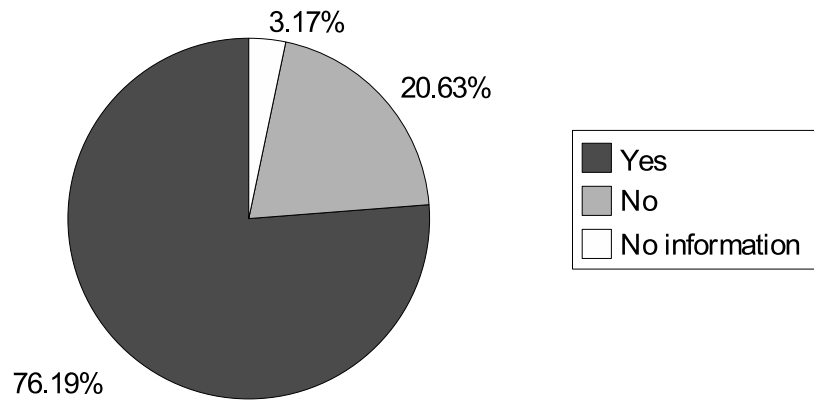


Figure 15: Participants in a romantic relationship

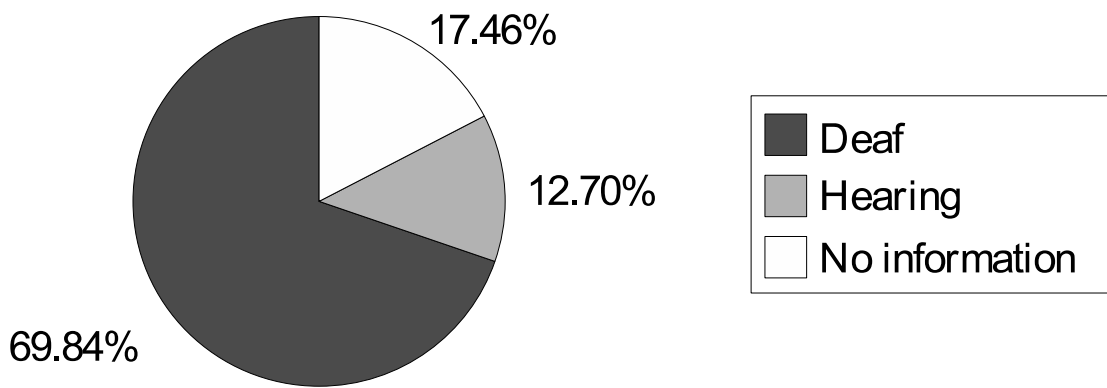


Figure 16: Hearing status of partner

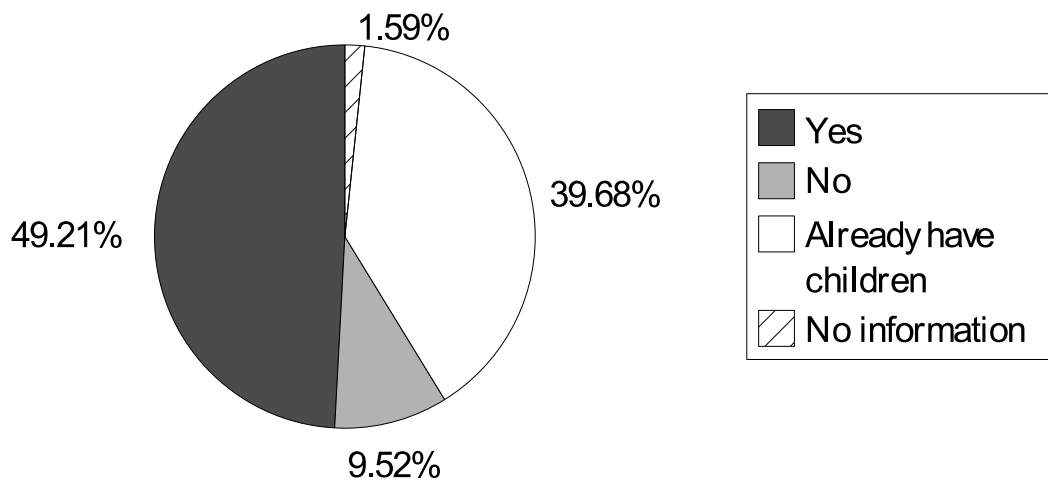


Figure 17: Desire to have children

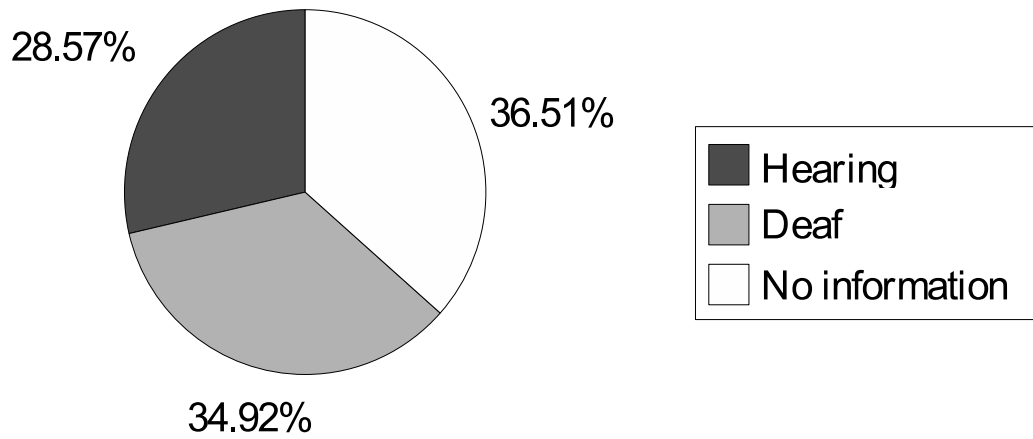


Figure 18: Desired hearing status of the children

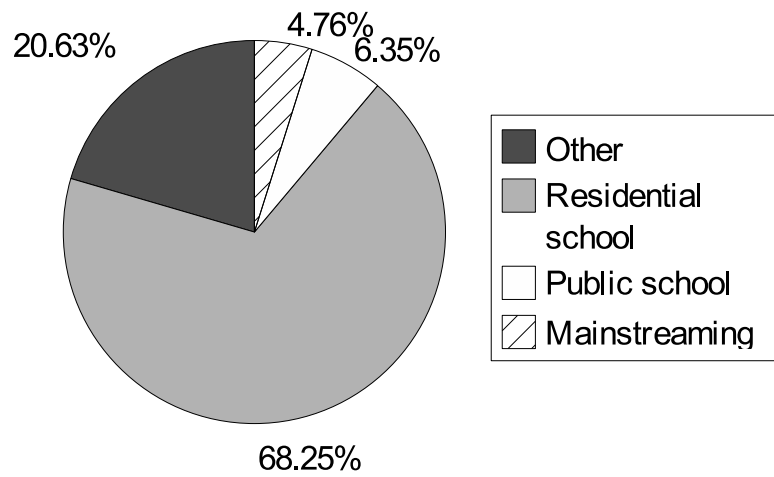


Figure 19: School that participants attended

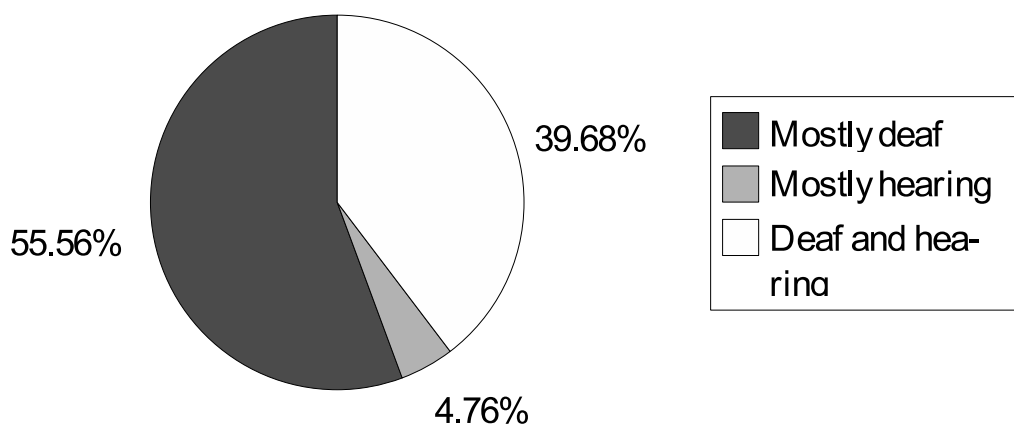


Figure 20: Hearing status of friends

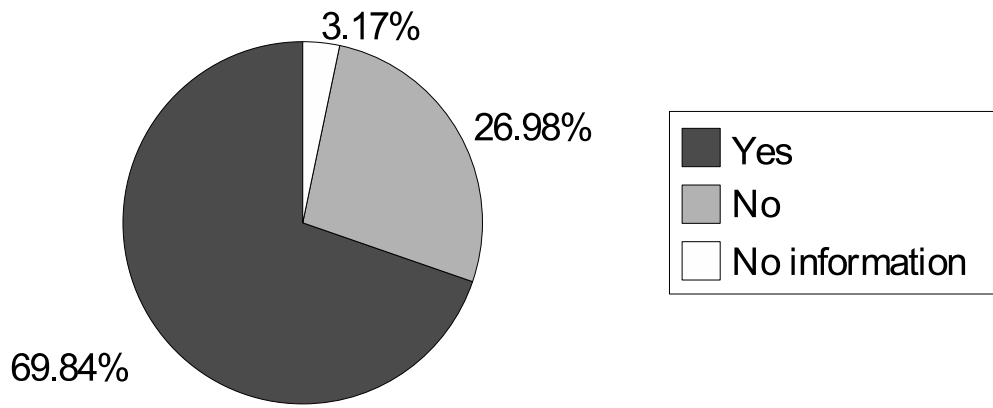


Figure 21: Membership at some institution

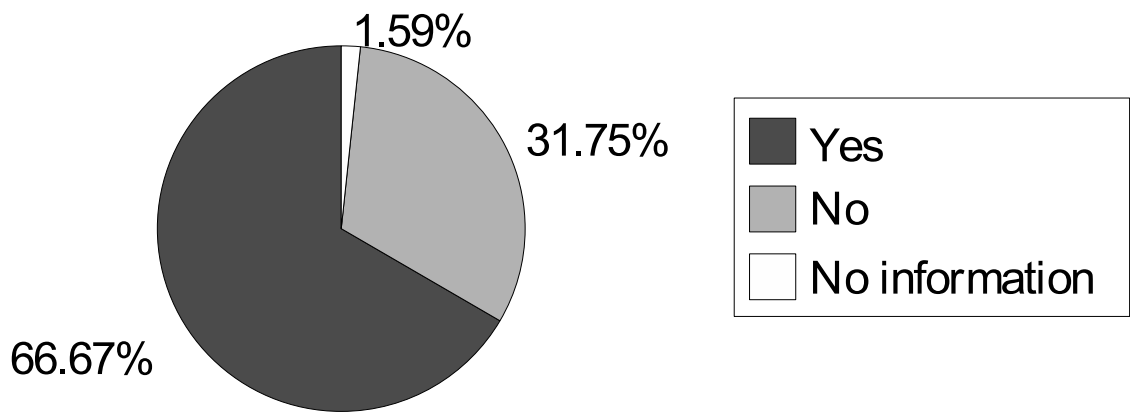


Figure 22: Subscription of newspapers or magazines

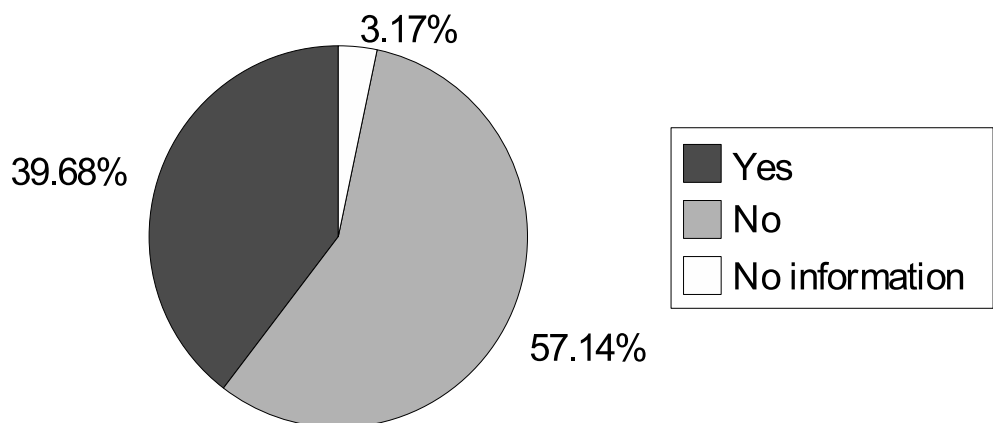


Figure 23: Participants knowing about Laurent, SD

## B Questionnaires

### B.1 English version

#### Questionnaire

This questionnaire is for a survey which will be part of my Master's thesis at the faculty of cultural studies at the University of Leipzig, Germany. This project examines integration of the Deaf in today's society. The questionnaire should only be filled out by deaf or hard of hearing people. If there is any question you don't feel comfortable with you may skip it at any time. To fill out this form should need approximately 20 minutes. Thank you for sharing your information. If you have any questions, please contact me at: [marionschulteis@gmx.net](mailto:marionschulteis@gmx.net) or [Marion.Schulteis@gallaudet.edu](mailto:Marion.Schulteis@gallaudet.edu).

If there is not enough space to answer one of the questions, please just add the answer at the end of the questionnaire and write the number of the question in front. All questionnaires will be treated confidentially and anonymous.

#### General information

1. You are:
  - male
  - female
  
2. How old are you?
  - Younger than 25
  - Between 25 and 34 years old
  - Between 35 and 44 years old
  - Between 45 and 54 years old
  - 55 years or older
  
3. Where are you from originally/ where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_  
+++++
  
4. How would you define your hearing status?
  - deaf
  - Deaf
  - hard of hearing
  - other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. When did you become deaf, Deaf, hard of hearing etc.?
  - Since I've been born
  - Since: \_\_\_\_\_

6. What was the cause of this?
- genetic (e.g. family members who are deaf as well)
  - because of a disease/sickness (which one: \_\_\_\_\_)
  - because of an accident/injury
  - I don't know
7. Do you have relatives that are deaf, Deaf or hard of hearing?
- Yes
  - No
8. If yes, which relatives?
- mother
  - father
  - siblings
  - grandmother
  - grandfather
  - other \_\_\_\_\_
9. If your parents (or one of them) is/are hearing, do they know sign language?
- Yes
  - No
10. If yes, when and how did they learn it?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
11. Did you ever receive oral/lipreading training?
- Yes
  - No
12. If yes, do you use those skills?
- regularly
  - rarely
  - never
13. Do you use sign language to communicate?
- Yes
  - No
14. If yes, do you use those skills?
- regularly

rarely

never

15. What has been the most challenging experience because of you deafness?

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---

16. Would you be willing to have an operation to regain/gain hearing?

Yes

No

Why?

---

---

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---

17. Are you in a romantic relationship?

Yes

No

18. If yes, is your partner deaf or hearing?

deaf

hearing

19. Do you want to have children?

Yes

No

I already have children (if so, how many and what is their hearing status?)

---

---

---

20. If you want to have kids would you prefer them to be:

hearing

deaf

21. Why?

---

---

---

**In this part of the questionnaire you will find mostly questions concerning social integration**

22. What three words best describe the Deaf community?

---

---

---

23. What kind of school did you attend?

- Residential school for the deaf
- Public school (not mainstreamed)
- Mainstream program
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

24. Most of your friends are:

- deaf
- Deaf
- hearing
- hard of hearing
- other

25. What hobbies do you have?

---

---

26. How/where do you meet/get to know other deaf/hard of hearing people?

---

---

27. Are you a member of any organization/association/club/union?

- Yes
- No

28. If yes, which one/s? (please write down the name and, if possible, web addresses):

---

---

---

29. If no, why not?

---

---

30. Do you subscribe to any papers or magazines?

Yes

No

31. If yes, which one/s and since when (please write down the name/s)?

---

---

---

32. If no, why not?

---

---

33. What kind of communication devices do you use?

Internet

Cell phone

Side kick

other: \_\_\_\_\_

34. How would you define Deaf culture?

---

---

---

35. Would you consider yourself as part of a (you may check more than one)?

linguistic minority

subculture

disability community

36. Have you ever heard of the project Laurent, South Dakota?

Yes

No

37. If yes, what do you think of it and would you like to live there and why?

---

---

---

38. What do you think would help Deaf and hearing people get along better?

---

---

---

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP

Please drop off this questionnaire to the department of international programs (Larry Musa)  
or to the History

Department (Susan Burch)

fax it to: 202-448-6954

or send it by mail to:

Marion Schulteis

Gallaudet University OIPS

800 Florida Ave. NE

20002 Washington D.C.

USA

## B.2 German version

### Fragebogen für Gehörlose

Dieser Fragebogen ist Teil meiner Magisterarbeit im Fachbereich Kulturwissenschaften an der Universität Leipzig. In der Magisterarbeit geht es um die Integration von Gehörlosen in die heutige Gesellschaft. Daher soll der Fragebogen ausschließlich von Gehörlosen oder Schwerhörigen ausgefüllt werden. Das Ausfüllen sollte ca. 20 Min. dauern. Vielen Dank für Deine Zeit.

Wenn Du irgendwelche Fragen hast, kannst Du mich gerne jederzeit kontaktieren: [marionschulteis@gmx.net](mailto:marionschulteis@gmx.net) oder [Marion.Schulteis@gallaudet.edu](mailto:Marion.Schulteis@gallaudet.edu).

Sollte der Platz für die Beantwortung einer Frage nicht ausreichen, füge die Antwort einfach am Ende des Fragebogens an und nenne vorher die Nummer der Frage zu der die Antwort gehört. Alle Fragebögen werden vertraulich behandelt!!!

### Generelle Informationen:

1. Du bist:

männlich

weiblich

2. Wie alt bist Du?

Jünger als 25

Zwischen 25 und 34 Jahre alt

Zwischen 35 und 44 Jahre alt

Zwischen 45 und 54 Jahre alt

55 Jahre oder älter

3. Wo bist Du geboren? \_\_\_\_\_

+++++

4. Wie bezeichnest Du Deinen Hörstatus?

taub

gehörlos

schwerhörig

stark schwerhörig

nicht hörend

anders: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Seit wann bist Du gehörlos/stark schwerhörig?

Seit Geburt

Seit: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Was ist die Ursache Deiner Hörbehinderung?
- genetisch (z.B. Hörgeschädigte Familienmitglieder)
  - durch Krankheit (welche: \_\_\_\_\_)
  - durch einen Unfall
  - ich kenne den Grund nicht
7. Hast Du Verwandte, die auch gehörlos/schwerhörig sind?
- Ja
  - Nein
8. Wenn ja, wer?
- Vater
  - Mutter
  - Geschwister
  - Oma
  - Opa
  - andere: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Falls Deine Eltern (oder einer Deiner Eltern) hören können, sprechen sie Gebärdensprache?
- Ja
  - Nein
10. Falls ja, wann und wie haben sie Gebärdensprache erlernt?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
11. Wurdest Du jemals im Sprechen oder Lippenlesen unterrichtet?
- Ja
  - Nein
12. Wenn ja, wie oft gebrauchst Du diese Fähigkeiten?
- regelmäßig
  - kaum
  - nie
13. Benutzt Du Gebärdensprache um zu kommunizieren?
- Ja
  - Nein
14. Wenn ja, wie oft gebrauchst Du diese Fähigkeit?
- regelmäßig

kaum

nie

15. Was war bisher die herausforderndste Situation für Dich aufgrund Deiner Gehörlosigkeit?

---

---

---

---

16. Käme es für Dich in Frage, durch einen operationalen Eingriff Dein Gehör zu erlangen/wiederzuerlangen?

Ja

Nein

Warum?

---

---

---

17. Befindest Du Dich momentan in einer festen Beziehung?

Ja

Nein

18. Wenn ja, ist Dein/e Partner/in gehörlos oder hörend?

gehörlos

hörend

19. Möchtest Du später Kinder haben?

Ja

Nein

Ich habe bereits Kinder (Wenn ja, wieviele und sind diese Gehörlos oder Hörend?).

---

---

20. Wenn Du Kinder haben möchtest, sollten diese lieber

gehörlos

hörend sein

egal?

21. Warum?

---

---

---

**In diesem Teil des Fragebogens soll es überwiegend um gesellschaftliche Integration gehen.**

22. Wie würdest Du die Gehörlosengemeinschaft in 3 Worten beschreiben?

---

---

---

23. Auf was für eine Schule bist Du gegangen?

- Gehörlosenschule
- Regelschule
- Integrationsschule (Hörenden und Gehörlose)
- andere \_\_\_\_\_

24. Wie setzt sich Dein Freundeskreis zusammen?

- überwiegend Gehörlose
- überwiegend Hörende
- Gehörlose und Hörende
- anders: \_\_\_\_\_

25. Welche Hobbies hast Du?

---

---

26. Wie/ Wo lernst Du andere Gehörlose/Schwerhörige kennen?

---

---

---

27. Bist Du Mitglied in irgendwelchen Vereinen/Organisationen/Klubs?

- Ja
- Nein

28. Wenn ja, in welchen (bitte den Namen nennen und wenn möglich die Internetadresse):

---

---

---

29. Wenn nein, warum nicht?

---

---

---

30. Hast Du irgendwelche Zeitungen/Zeitschriften/Illustrierte abonniert?

- Ja
- Nein

31. Wenn ja, welchen und seit wann? (bitte den Namen nennen):

---

---

---

32. Wenn nein, warum nicht?

---

---

33. Welche Kommunikationsmittel benutzt Du?

- Internet
- Handy
- Blueberry
- Pager
- andere: \_\_\_\_\_

34. Wie würdest Du die Gehörlosenkultur beschreiben?

---

---

---

35. Welche/n der folgenden Optionen würdest Du Dich als zugehörig bezeichnen (mehrere Antworten möglich)

- Sprachliche Minderheit
- Subkultur
- Gehörlosengesellschaft
- Gruppe mit gleicher Behinderung

36. Hast Du jemals von dem Projekt Laurent, South Dakota gehört?

- Ja
- Nein

37. Wenn ja, was denkst Du darüber und könntest Du Dir vorstellen dort zu leben und warum?

---

---

---

38. Was müsste Deiner Meinung nach von Seiten der Politik/Gesellschaft her getan werden um das Miteinander zwischen Gehörlosen und Hörenden zu verbessern?

---

---

---

VIELEN DANK FÜR DEINE HILFE

Bitte sende den Fragebogen entweder per Email ([marionschulteis@gmx.net](mailto:marionschulteis@gmx.net); [marion.schulteis@gallaudet.edu](mailto:marion.schulteis@gallaudet.edu)) per Fax: 001-202-448-6954 (z.Hd. Marion Schulteis)

oder per Post:

Marion Schulteis  
Gallaudet University OIPS  
800 Florida Ave. NE  
20002 Washington D.C.  
USA.

an mich zurück!

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