

Having been born hearing, I knew little about the deafness and deaf culture but always considered deafness a disability. I always assumed being deaf was a “problem” and I am grateful to be born with the ability to hear. These assumptions about deafness and deaf culture seem sensible to any hearing person however, they can be offensive to the hearing impaired. According to the ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act, defines “a person with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity” (“A Guide to Disability Rights Laws”, 2012). Being born deaf is not something that “needs to be fixed” some even feel fortunate for the quiet world they live in, the support of the community, and the ability to communicate. Communicating through primarily sign language as well as lip reading the deaf community embraces a language that is their own. American Sign Language has origins going as far back as 200 years states the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, proving the independence of the deaf community to rely on unspoken communication to relate to each other and the hearing, speaking world around them. The idea of deafness as a disability is a modern myth surrounding those with deafness and the deaf community. This is typically overlooked in today’s society and the importance of it is not well known.

When discrimination comes to mind the deaf community is often overlooked but to be deaf in a hearing world presents many struggles. Although with many modes of communication and a supportive similar community the majority of hearing Americans do not understand or know sign language. Fitting in with the deaf and hearing world requires twice as much work to prove the ability of a deaf person. Communication with an outsider of the deaf community requires twice as much work. All over the world deaf citizens are expected to learn to lip read and speak through speech therapy, but the same does not apply for those who are hearing.

Hearing citizens are not expected to know sign language and very few bother to learn. Many overlook the attitudes of deaf culture and question why a deaf person would not do everything in their control to fix their hearing and become 'normal'. While some deaf people choose to use advanced technology to overcome the obstacle of hearing loss, they can feel like they are caught between two worlds, that of the deaf and that of the hearing world. Hearing aids, cochlear implants, and speech therapy are all ways for communication but the spoken language is nearly a foreign language for those born deaf or hard of hearing. Wanting to hear is often misunderstood by the deaf community because it is not honoring the way in which they were born. From the hearing perspective they want to encourage the deaf to speak and write and use assistive technology to become as 'normal' as possible.

Often the deaf are referred to as "deaf and dumb", "mute", "people with a disability", or someone that "needs to be fixed". These labels are commonly inferred by outsiders of the deaf community rather than those actually part of it. Many are misconceptions assumed from those who portray their own thoughts of deafness on the hearing impaired culture. Most deaf or hearing impaired would reject these stereotypes, because some see it as a gift, a community, and a way of life rather than a "defect". To fix a problem, to the deaf which does not exist, seems insulting. Trying to change a deaf person's hearing to them is like trying to change someone's skin color. Rather than a disability many see it as how they are as a person and what they were born into. Having multiple ways of communication and few restrictions on daily life is far from a disability. Many of those born deaf do not wish to alter themselves and appreciate the quiet lives they have.

Discrimination can occur from a person, groups, schools, and largely in the job market. Employers are less likely to hire a deaf or hearing impaired person. The deaf struggle to find jobs

and even careers. Typically race, religion, beliefs, culture and gender are things that cannot be discriminated against when applying for a position, so how can so many employers refuse to hire a deaf employee? Their culture makes them who they are and if their beliefs include not altering their hearing to become more 'mainstream' and widely accepted this is highly wrong. Some particular positions require the ability to hear, but there is a way around most jobs and careers that would allow for any person hearing or not that otherwise qualifies for the position to work adequately. Particularly for those born deaf the ability to hear and reproduce sound, which happens at an early age, is lost. As a result, many partial or completely deaf people learning speech have difficulty being able to correct themselves for intelligible speech. The term "deaf and dumb" has been used for many decades and gives the illusion that because someone lacks the ability to hear, they are also 'dumb' which meant unable to speak. This term can be offensive because it has been proved for many years, the deaf can speak, some very well, and do not lack any intelligence because of this. How well one speaks can often give a listener a key to their level of education, job, and status. Sometimes unintentional prejudice happens when we hear someone talking, other times judgements are made on purpose. For the deaf a large number of people listen to them produce sounds like a speaker of a foreign language and think because of this they have less education and can be less qualified for things like job positions. A deaf person and hearing person of the same level education and experience are equal candidates for positions but the misconception the majority of the time is the deaf person, because of their speech, is less intelligent.

Controversial technologies to improve or fix a deaf person's hearing like the cochlear implant surgery are widely debated among the deaf community. A cochlear implant is a device implanted in the inner cochlea of the ear as well as part of the brain. It permits sound waves and

can imitate the experience of hearing to someone with profound hearing loss. Although this seems like a great scientific advancement the deaf community has some strong feelings regarding the surgery. The movie “Sound and Fury” by director Josh Aronson does a good job portraying the divide between the hearing and deaf world. This documentary follows a family with deaf and hearing members, one of the young deaf girls wants the implant but her deaf parents are against it, while her hearing grandmother encourages it, this causes conflict between the family members. From an outside perspective a technology that can make a young girl hear seems wonderful and without question. The deaf parents feel the girl would be changing a part of who she is, and as a community with a language and culture it upsets them that their daughter would rather hear. In this case it has gotten so extreme members of the family do not even talk to each other anymore, this gives us insight to the importance of being deaf or hard of hearing. Despite the pressures to ‘fixed’ by the outside world many deaf see hearing as a socially constructed myth, especially for those born deaf, who have never felt like they were missing out on any aspects of life. Being able to hear makes you complete, you can participate in activities and enjoy things like music, movies, and stories of others without special accommodations.

Drawing attention to this issue because of its importance and little knowledge of the subject. When the issue of human rights is discussed vulnerable groups like the deaf community are overlooked often. Drawing awareness and educating others to the significance of treating all humans equally, no matter what race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. The deaf and hearing impaired face many challenges and are referred to as disabled when they are in fact capable of a normal happy life.