

**“A Study of College Students at California University of Pennsylvania and Their
Knowledge of Deaf Culture”**

An Honors Thesis

by

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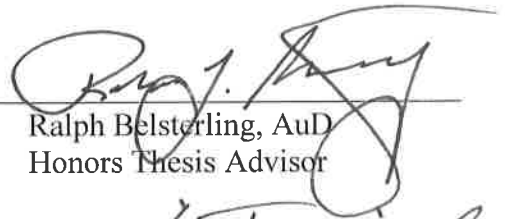
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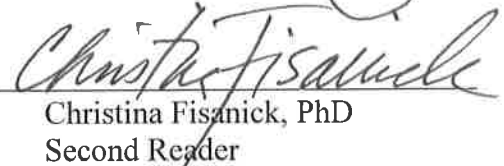
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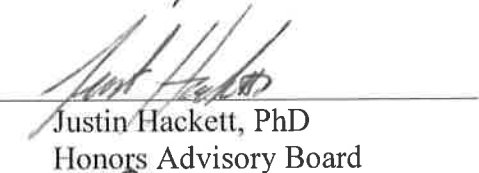
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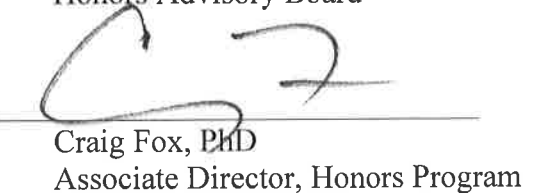
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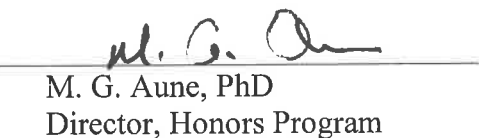
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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to create an educational program to inform hearing individuals about deaf culture. There will be a brief explanation of what stereotypes and misconceptions are currently seen by society of deaf culture and American Sign Language (ASL). Corrections of these misconceptions supported by research will then follow. There are two educational programs proposed in this paper; An educational program for middle school and high schoolers, and An educational program for undergraduates and professionals. The two programs are broken down into sections and explained how the data will be collected and information instructed. The hope of proposing these two seminar type programs is to educate students and professionals about the truths of deaf culture and explain why it is important to be educated on this culture.

In this day and age, it is important for everyone to be educated about multiple cultures because of who we come into contact with on a daily basis. “As our society becomes increasingly multicultural, many struggle to reconcile the conflicting cultural expectations that they face.” (McCaw & Zea, 2010). The deaf community, like any community, has its own culture with rules, traditions, and language. Also like any culture, there are major misconceptions based on stereotypes from the media. Deaf individuals are typically seen through the lens of the dominant hearing society’s perception, i.e., that being deaf is an impairment (Wolsey, Dunn, Gentzke, Joharchi, & Clark, 2017) These misconceptions are why there should be a universal educational program to inform the truth about deaf culture in America.

Some of the most common misconceptions about deaf culture come from the way the media portrays the deaf community. Between TV shows, movies, news articles, and other media, there are multiple outlets where stereotypes are portrayed. Misconceptions of deaf culture and deaf people vary around different areas of their culture. Many people believe that deaf people cannot speak or communicate through the use of a telephone. Other misconceptions are centered around the behaviors of the deaf community, including the correct way to greet or get the attention of a deaf person. Some people even believe that deaf people cannot drive. One of the newest stereotypes revolves around cochlear implants. Cochlear implants are a great invention, which make some people think that these are “a cure” when they are just assistive listening devices.

Deaf culture includes members from the large deaf community, which then has subgroups within it. According to Agrawal, Platz, & Niparko, (2004), the overall prevalence of unilateral (hearing loss in one ear) and bilateral (hearing loss in both ears) hearing loss was 16.1% corresponding to 29 million Americans. In this community, members often see a distinct

difference between being deaf and being Deaf with a capital D. Deaf people that view themselves as a capital D deaf, are proud to be deaf, they usually don't believe in hearing aids or cochlear implants. They use sign and most likely no verbal communication. Where there are other groups of deaf people who learn spoken language, and have cochlear implants. These are just two of the many sub groups in the deaf community with various beliefs.

In America, the language for deaf individuals is American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is a true language with its own syntax, phonology, notation, morphology, classifiers, and semiology (O'Brien, Kroner, & Placier, 2015). The language itself has many stereotypes and misconceptions as well. A few things that people believe about sign language is that all deaf people sign, sign language is universal, sign language is word for word English, and that anyone can sign correctly. These are only a few misconceptions about ASL and deaf culture in general, but there are plenty that have yet to be addressed in this paper. Unrelated to this project, the American Sign Language Club on California University of Pennsylvania's campus, took a quiz as an activity on deaf culture facts, to see how many misconceptions fooled them. They collectively missed many of the questions, due to stereotypes. If students that are studying this culture make mistakes about deaf culture, imagine what people that have no idea about this community must think.

In order to stray American society away from these types of misconceptions, there needs to be a program in place to educate hearing individuals about a culture they do not know. There are often programs like this for professionals in specific fields who will be dealing with deaf and hard of hearing individuals, but there isn't a universal program. The best way to educate people on the truth about deaf culture, is to have a curriculum-based presentation focused on this topic that is available for age groups that need the information the most. This new program would be

taught by someone knowledgeable in the subject, and will let the audience realize how many stereotypes they give to the deaf community that are inaccurate. The “Educating about Deaf Culture for All” program will be specifically geared for each target audience, but basically the same for each age group.

Each program no matter what age group will have some type of pre-test, lesson, and post-test, and an additional post-test a few weeks after. Pre-test would consist of a fill in the blank and true/false questionnaire that the students will keep on them through the course of the program. The lesson itself will be a combination of videos, lecture, and different activities that support the information being taught based on the specific age group. The post-test would be a repeat of the pre-test to see if they learned any of the information better than before the lesson.

The pre-test will have basic questions that any age group instructed should be able to answer, but will include many of the stereotypes listed above. The questions will be different based on age group, which will be laid out later. The pretest will then be scored based on the Deaf Acculturation Scale (DAS), (McCaw & Zea, 2010). The DAS is a newly developed scale, that takes into account two separate subscales acculturation to deaf culture and acculturation to hearing culture. The program, itself will show several videos with real-life experiences and examples, while also having a lecture that go with the videos. Each segment will also have a short activity to accompany it to solidify the information.

During the program, the stereotypes and misconceptions of deaf culture will be addressed. “Some research indicates that deaf drivers may have some advantages over hearing drivers” (Zodda, et al., 2012). There are so many assistive listening devices and alternate forms of communication for deaf individuals to use now. There is a specific telephone called teletypewriter or TTY, a device that will interpret the callers English into sign language, which

then displays on the screen. There is a stereotype claiming that deaf people cannot speak, but this is false, as many deaf students go through years of speech services and can speak just as well as a hearing person. Each of these and more will be addressed in the appropriate way for each presentation.

The deaf culture education program for the middle school and high school aged students will consist of a presentation which includes videos, open-ended discussion questions, and a mini post-test at the time of presentation and one two weeks later. At this age, middle adolescents are increasingly capable of abstract thinking and organize complex thoughts about other people. (Onrust, Otten, Lammers, & Smit, 2015). Which makes them a good age group to start the program with. It would be administered to a large or small audience, or by a professional with access to the program.

The pre-test would be included in the very beginning of the presentation. The presenter would go through the questions and ask each student to respond, using an electronic data collector, to see how the majority of students would answer. The questions would range from minor misconceptions, like deaf people can't speak, to harder questions about basic sign language. Using this range of questions, it will give the presenter an accurate depiction of how knowledgeable the specific audience is about deaf culture, and what aspects of the presentation need to be focused on. Then the presenter would go through a 90 minute presentation, leaving 30 minutes for the post-test, results, and questions.

After going through the entire pre-test, the presenter will begin the program by showing a video with a clip from a ted talk by Pamela Weisman titled "open our ears to the deaf." This segment of her presentation includes the opening, in which she discusses a time she met a deaf woman who was using sign language and didn't know how to react. After viewing this segment

from her Ted Talk, the presenter would then involve the audience by asking them to share a time that this experience may have happened to them. Giving a few students time to answer and respond to the question, the presenter will then go on to explain the correct ways to have a greeting with a deaf person, how to get a deaf person's attention, and other manners to have while holding a conversation with that individual.

The next part of the presentation, the presenter will go through some of the questions from the pre-test, and lead an open discussion with the students about whether the questions are accurate, and if they had any questions about them. For the final part of the presentation, "Facts about American Sign Language"; a video of someone signing the national anthem will play, so the students can see sign language being used to a song that they all know, as one of the easiest ways to learn sign language is to sign songs. Facts about sign language will flash across the screen as the audience discusses which of these are true from their pre-test. Then the presenter will show basic signs including "bathroom", "name", "boy", and "girl", along with a few others and try to teach the audience so that they will have a basic knowledge of how to communicate with a deaf individual, if they ever came into a situation that requires them to do so. The point of this presentation is to allow middle and high schoolers the opportunity to learn facts about deaf culture and sign language, and learn basic information in order to communicate with a deaf person. Hopefully by the end of the 90 minute session, they would be able to do this.

The post-test would consist of the same questions shown in the beginning of the presentation. It will, however, be given in the form of a questionnaire for the students to anonymously turn in, so that data can be collected. The rest of the time, will allow for questions from the audience if there is any. Hopefully, the presentation made its point to the audience and the information stuck with the students. This will be tested with the same post-test given two

weeks after the presentation. If all goes well, the results for the second post-test will be the same as the results from the post-test immediately following the presentation.

The deaf culture education program for undergraduates and professionals would include a similar but slightly more professional program. This would be a pre-test, presentation, and a post-test to determine % of information retained. The program would be more geared towards professional settings in which the information would be needed. Including role playing scenario's and being taught manners in deaf culture within the 90 minute session. Like Octavian Robinson teaches in his courses, participants will discuss how this information relates to their other coursework or professional situations.

The pre-test will be given at the entrance of the program, in the form of an anonymous but numbered questionnaire and collected to review later. The presenter will then begin the program, by showing a longer clip of Pamela Weisman Ted Talk, in which she discusses how we need to be more open to deaf culture, and then have the audience discuss what this means to them in their profession or future profession. These conversations should spark discussion leading into the next section with the facts of the common misconceptions of deaf culture in the professional or collegiate world. After these facts are discussed, including how to get a deaf person's attention, greetings, basic manners, and other facts about the culture, the participants will then partake in a role play activity with scenario's they might encounter. If this was a program for future doctors, they would role play a deaf patient in the room with a hearing doctor trying to appropriately communicate. If it was a business program, the scenario would be comprised of a deaf customer and customer service representative and how that interaction should appropriately go.

After the scenarios have been completed, the rest of the program should take place around the basics of professional American sign language. This would entail the participants learning the basic manners of using sign language, and the basic signs they would need based on their discipline. The main phrases to learn would be, "Hello, how are you?", "What is your name?", "The bathroom is over there.", "Do you need an interpreter?", and other common sign language phrases a professional would use. After this, the audience will get a chance to practice the signs taught and ask any questions of the presenter.

The post-test will then be given as a questionnaire anonymously, with the same number as their post-test in order to keep data in order. The questionnaire will have the same questions as the pre-test to see if the participants learned the correct answers and truths during the presentation. The same post-test will be taken two weeks later, to see if the participants still remember the information. This data will then be compiled to see if the program is actively educating participants about deaf culture and American Sign Language.

These programs listed include basic information about deaf culture and sign language, in order for students and professionals to understand the deaf community. They are the starting foundation of what facts everyone should be educated on, as there are so many misconceptions currently about deaf culture. The hope is for the educational programs to spread across the country so that more and more hearing people can be correctly informed about a culture that is usually misinterpreted.

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