

Chris Stephenson

The Text of New Relationships:

Building Deaf Community in E-Space

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Technology and Culture

“ Each medium, like language itself, classifies the world for us, sequences it, frames it enlarges it, reduces it, argues a case for what the world is like...Each new medium of communication recreates or modifies culture in its image; and it is naive to believe that a medium of communication or, indeed, any technology is merely a tool, a way of doing.” Neil Postman

Constructions of Deafness

- ▲ Sociocultural constructions:
 - ➡ fluid & diverse
 - ➡ often oppressive

- ▲ medical model
 - ➡ pathological state

- ▲ cultural model
 - ➡ normal state
 - ➡ historically created
 - ➡ actively transmitted

Culture vs. Community

▲ Deaf Culture:

- ☞ ASL as primary means of communication
- ☞ set of beliefs about connection to the larger society

▲ Deaf Community

- ☞ self-constructed identification
- ☞ may be shared by Deaf/deaf and hearing people regardless of primary communication modality

Benefits of CMC

- ▲ A venue where information can be shared with a broader audience.
- ▲ A shared writing-based environment lowers barriers caused by differing communication modalities (other than written English).
- ▲ Potential for meeting psychosocial needs.
- ▲ May reduce discrimination experienced due to difference.

Features of E-Discourse

- ▲ No visual and auditory cues.
- ▲ Asynchronous (un-real time).
- ▲ Meaning signaled and negotiated through individualized styles and contextual conventions.
- ▲ A set of social relationships within which communication takes place.
- ▲ May break down traditional hierarchies of status and authority.

Research Venue

DEAF-L:

- ▲ An electronic listserv created for discussion of topics and issues of interest to deaf people.
- ▲ Automatically collects and redistributes electronic messages among a large group of subscribers.
- ▲ Simultaneous read and write in multiple streams.

Methodology

Subjects

- ▲ Self-selected via participation.
- ▲ Approximately 550 members.
- ▲ Limited by accessibility, both technical and linguistic.
- ▲ Some are active participants.
- ▲ Others “lurk”.
- ▲ Biographical information gathered informally over time.

Procedure

- ▲ All communication captured and logged for 20 days.
- ▲ Complete texts and descriptive markers stored in computer database.
- ▲ Structured for two views of the data (full text and markers only).
- ▲ Steps taken to ensure ethical use and right to privacy.

Communication Context

- ▲ 42.5 messages per day
- ▲ highest volume at 75 on day 17
- ▲ lowest volume at 28 on day 1
- ▲ longest message at 1694 words
- ▲ 199.8 mean words per message
- ▲ 143 medium words per message
- ▲ 170,098 words of text
- ▲ 1600 pages of text

Defining Community

- ▲ How members see themselves and others.
- ▲ How they use the medium to provide and receive information.
- ▲ How they use the textual and visual potential of the medium to create and foster a sense of interrelatedness and belonging.

- ▲ Subjects sometimes provide information about their own hearing status:

“Yeah, I suppose I am deaf..No known cause.” (229/21)

- ▲ May differentiate between physiological deafness and cultural deafness.

“I was born profoundly deaf... and am culturally Deaf.” (229/21)

- ▲ More likely to identify others on the basis of their views on key issues.

“Paul Smith was an oralist. Stevie was an oralist. West is an oralist.”
(229/21)

- ▲ Community membership is therefore predicated on what one *thinks* about deafness rather than whether or not one *is* deaf.

Community Building

▲ Providing Personal Information

"Maggie - teacher who is spending her days in closets rather than the classroom." (81/18)

"Now I'm having a cold." (177/11)

"(taking a note to go visit my mum this week-end...=)))))" (137/11)

"I passed electrotechnics with 26/30 HURRA!" (813/74)

▲ Support and Encouragement

"Brad, so sorry that you missed the hearing requirements on your recent test...That must be extremely frustrating.." (285/59)

"I know that the deaf community would not turn against you if you wore CI. They would respect your decision, but they would pat your shoulder with sincere sympathy if your CI does not help. Bon chance and bon courage". (372/21)

Information Sharing: Peer to Peer

▲ Access:

- ✚ heterogeneous

- ✚ unlimited by geography

"If anyone in this newsgroup can help, I would appreciate some information on closed caption television..". (442/119)

"What if I got one [CI] and turned it on, and I got dizzy? Anyways, any comments on the matter is appreciated." (155/54)

Help for Parents

"Are deaf children more prone to nightmares? Someone told me that and since our son has them regularly I thought I would ask."
(345/97)

"I don't know what is the situation of other deaf children, but at my childhood I did have nightmares." (413/42)

"Does anyone know where I can find videos that teach deaf children signing?...Thanks in advance for suggestions." (151/53)

"Random House has a good series called Sign Me a Story..with Linda Bove. They are great because they are stories like Littel Red Riding Hood, Goldylocks etc. my son is 10 and he loves to watch them over, and over and over!! (203/67)

Incorporating ASL

"The national Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf has a symbol for interpreting (it looks like two hands in the "F" position of the manual alphabet)". (510/09)

"Oh, well ...when I sign this, I fingerspell it on both hands, with a gesture of throwing my hands up in the air at the end. Like I'm doing the best I can...". (200/15)

"long wait wait wait me puzzle".
(115/43)

Making Meaning

▲ Personal names and pronouns:

"What? You think we should take it to EDUDEAF? Maybe we will - but we need you folks who speak 96 different :) languages to help us poor educators." (83/18)

"Whatta ya think, Rose? Peggy? Maria?" (83/18)

"Hi, 5223....Sounds like you're a droid!" (105/17)

▲ Textual cues:

"This is not a flame" (314/44)

"Just my two cents.." (50/29)

"<in a deeply sarcastic mode> No pack Mentality in the D/deaf Community??? Ho Ho Ho" (323/93)

"I've 'heard' that jumping off a tall building is lots of fun! Try it! <really pissed off>". (696/40)

▲ Virtual gestures:

"Not on us. Not on Sadie either <*winking*>. :)" (49/21)

"You're referring to deaf people as people with communication disorders??!! *incredulous look* That would explain a lot of your postings." (113/01)

"<GRIN> <GRIN>" (57/11)

Smilies

▲ Happy:

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▲ Sad:

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Community Desired

"What's so hard is that either way, I'm not really part of the culture. I am not part of the hearing world (and won't even be if I do get a CI), but also, the born deaf community would not consider me culturally 'D'deaf either. Please let me hear from you, I could use your views!! That's why i specifically got a computer to get on the internet, I need your opinions!!!! Thanks for listening." (339/64)

Community Experienced

"Of everyone I have seen in here, you have a personal history that is closest to my own." (725/40)

"We're a pretty close bunch of people :)." (375/35)

"I felt that we were a bit of an extended family...some of those who left had said as much." (774/133)

"I have learned a lot from the list, more than I can ever know. It changed and shaped my opinions and attitudes to the point where some of the new attitudes and opinions are at the other end of what it used to be." (738/16)

"I just wanted to...tell all of you...that you have taken a very naive individual (me) and provided a forum for enlightenment that could not be found in any book. I still have a lot to learn about deafness and Deaf Culture and thanks to this list ..I will." (369/14)