Deaf Ethnicity, Deafhood and Deaf Ethnosexuality

An Introduction

Christmas Lecture

- A lecture to make academic topics accessible to people by learning in a fun and accessible way.

Donation to WFD

- World Federation of the Deaf
  - Office in Finland.
  - President is Markku Jokinen.
  - Represent Deaf people at the UN.
  - Instrumental to the recent UN convention.
  - Support for developing countries.

John Walker

- Convenor of Deaf Studies
- Based at University of Sussex
- Interests include professional practice, interpreting, language/community/culture.
Who wrote what?

- ‘Deaf Ethnicity’ - Harlan Lane (2007)

Defining Deaf People

- Identification of hearing loss = mild, moderate, severe, profound.
- Segregation in education = partially deaf/partially hearing.
- Standardisation in social care = hearing impaired/visually impaired/sensory impaired.
- Defining ethnic boundaries = Deaf/deaf/hearing.

Defining communities

- Community by territory
- Community by interest
- Community by attachment
  - (Wilcox 1960s)
Deaf people

- Hard of hearing
- Deaf
- Deafened
- Deafblind
- (RNID)

Deaf Ethnicity
Lane 2007

Race and Ethnicity

Navarrete’s Baptism of Christ
Goya’s Deaf Man

Photo by Pasdeshi
Ethnic Deaf

Art
sign language
theatre
culture
TV programmes
positive action
poetry
annual events
businesses
history
families
narratives
Deaf professionals
Deaf schools
films
places
Deaf pubs
Deaf clubs
who's who
politics

Ethnicity

• Ethnic dreams:
  • A Deaf town (Flournoy 1855)
  • Town in South Dakota, US

• Ethnic fears:
  • Alexander Graham Bell - prevent marriage between deaf people
  • Royal Commission on Deaf Education 1890

Ethnic Swedish (Finland)
Ethnic Dong (China)
The Ethnicity Criteria

- Collective name
- Feeling of community
- Norms of behaviour
- Social structure
- Customs
- Language
  - (Smith 1986)

- Values
- Knowledge
- History
- Kinship
- Art forms

A case for ethnicity

- If the Deaf community embraces ‘disability’, the community will gradually decline, less use of sign language and community membership: the focus will be on mainstreaming and inclusion.

- If the Deaf community embraces ‘ethnicity’, the community will grow, it is expected that Deaf people will use sign language, etc.

Disability or Linguistic Minority Group

Finkelstein vs. Ladd (1993)

Deaf world

- sign language
- social activities
- SL teaching
- political activities
- sport
- Art

Deaf service agencies
- Interpreter services
- religious services
- goods and services
- Deaf history
- Deaf education

Hearing world

- spoken language
- banking
- legal
- law enforcement
- military
- refuse collection
- medical care
- transportation

- Interpreter services
- religious services
- goods and services
- Deaf history
- Deaf education
- Deaf service agencies
A case against ethnicity

- 97% of deaf children are born to hearing parents, therefore little inherited culture (Jokinen’s Sign Language Person criticises this).
- Most ethnic groups fade after the 2nd or 3rd generation - not the case for Deaf people.
- Deaf people from other ethnicity prefer to be Deaf than anything else.

Deafhood
Ladd 2003

Colonialism

- Ladd draws comparisons with racial tensions in nations and communities (eg. Apartheid in South Africa)
- Pre-colonialism
- Colonialism
- Post-colonialism

Pre-colonialism

- Tribal cultures
- Complex community structures
- Religion
- Medicine
- Language
- Culture
Colonialism

- Invading ethnic on tribal population.
- Indigenous people enticed by advanced technology, food, alcohol, culture, religion, and money/trade.
- The trade off - loss in culture, self regulation, language, religion.
- Overt oppression - segregation, low living conditions, lawless and social control, lack of democracy.

Post-colonialism

- Removal of minority groups in power.
- Liberated society attempt to recapture colonial behaviours and experience power for themselves.
- Subaltern Others.

The Parisian Banquets

- J. Ferdinand Berthier (1803-1886)
- Set up a banquet in memory of Abbe De l’Epee (c.1820-1830)
- Originally for deaf men but later invited women, journalists, Government officials, and hearing people in general.
- Held at the Central Society in Paris.
- Empower deaf people to become more knowledgeable of their rights and influence legislation, through debate.

A banquet to 200 deaf and dumb men and women took place at St. Mande, near Paris, yesterday. Several speeches were made, which were eagerly followed, if not listened to, and very much applauded. Perhaps this needs an explanation. The term deaf and dumb has become a misnomer. Children born deaf are now no longer dumb, as they were necessarily of old. They are now taught by ingenious methods to understand and imitate the motions of the lips in ordinary speech. The New York Times, August 6, 1888

Published: August 6, 1888
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Francis Maginn (1861-1918)

- Born in County Cork, Ireland.
- Held a non-qualified teaching post in Royal School for the Deaf in Margate.
- Travelled to America to study at the college that later became Gallaudet University.
- Returned to challenge the Royal Commission on Deaf Education 1890 by setting up a Steering Group, this in turn formed the BDDA.

His manifesto

- National Association of the Deaf (opposed to the British Deaf and Dumb Association).
- An association for and by deaf people.
- Objected to pure oral education.
- Objected to the prohibition of marriage between deaf people.
- Objected to ‘benevolent parternalism’.

A change of fortune

- A hearing man ‘who could sign’ was elected as the first President of the BDDA by a last minute entry, his name was William Sleight.
- Francis Maginn was offered a regional vice presidency, a regional role with no power.

A fundamental moment in Deaf history in the UK.

- Deaf people were removed from power.
- Paternalism ruled!
- Linguistic and cultural genocide. (UN)
- A single act that took deaf people into the dark ages and into a colonised existence.
Cultural Capital

- Rooted in Marx (Das Capital)
- Coined by Bourdieu

Would you like to buy...

- A violin
- A ticket to see Swan Lake
- A ticket for a George Michael concert
- A tour at the national gallery
- Collective works of Shakespeare
- Sing along at the last night of the Proms
- Invitation to the Queen’s Garden Party

Would you rather buy...

- Ticket for the John Smith Comedy Show
- Watch a film at the Deaf Film Festival
- Watch Deaf programmes on the Community Channel
- Frances Elton’s Sign Linguistics Lecture
- A trip on the Deaf cruise
- A night at the Deaf pub

Cultural Capital

- Cultural Capital often governs the decisions made by hearing parents and education authorities.
- It is a false economy: exposure to ‘hearing Culture’ does not equate increased capital, but less. (due to discrimination)
- Deaf community has its own cultural worth.
‘The subaltern cannot speak’
Spivak 1985

- ‘They cannot represent themselves; they cannot be spoken for.’
- Gramsci coined the term, the subaltern.
- Not synonymous with ‘the oppressed’; working class people are oppressed but not subalterns (Labour Party, Trade Unions).
- Developed from the literary works of a Bengali woman.

- No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself.

- (Hooks 1990)
Equality by sound

• Amplified sound within the limitations of technology.
• Perceived equality by shared experience of sound, but perhaps not in the same way.
• New needs developed: management of dialogue, acoustics, lack of sense of depth/direction/prosody.
• Brought about new services: notetakers, speedtext operators, lipspeakers, palantypists.

In our endeavours to come closer to what is ‘hearing’, we have in turn discovered isolation.

Deafhood

• A personal journey of discovery - the transition from deaf to Deaf.
• Oralism, hearing aids and cochlear implants colonises deaf people.
• The therapeutic benefits of exploring one’s history, awareness of political oppression, and self worth ... politicising the Deaf person and leaving the subaltern behind.
• Potentially become a counter-narrative to society; a Post Modernist movement.

Deaf Ethnosexuality

Walker, adapted from Nagel 2003
Marriage

- 80% of Deaf people are likely to marry, or form a civil partnership, with another Deaf person.
- 97% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents.
- It is possible for families to have multiple generations of Deaf families.

Deaf families

- 3% of Deaf children are born into Deaf families.
- Deaf families may come from several generations.
- These families may see themselves responsible to uphold the Deaf traditions and customs, therefore it would be expected for Deaf offspring to marry a Deaf person.
- If a child marries out of the ethnic group, there is a potential discussion.

Hearing families with deaf children

- Hearing parents aspire to bring up their children like themselves and this has encouraged oralism and auditory interventions.
- If the deaf offspring decides to participate in the Deaf community or form a relationship with a deaf person, (like Deaf families) this may cause friction.

Movement across ethnic boundaries

- Ethnosexual settlers – Deaf people to move to hearing world and settle there.
- Ethnosexual sojourners – Deaf people who move into the hearing world but return when the relationship is over.
Movement across ethnic boundaries

- Ethnorelational adventurers – casual relationships that may form between two individuals from different ethnicity, e.g., Deaf and hearing.

- Ethnorelational invaders – where hearing people invade the community through abuse, rape, and acts of war.

Globalisation

- International events, such as WFD congress and Deaflympics, are important events in the social calendar.

- There are more opportunities for sexual liaison amongst Deaf people globally than between hearing people. Sign languages transpires across national boundaries more easily than spoken languages.

Ethnorelational conflict

- In the UK, the proposed Human Embryo and Fertilisation Bill gives power to clinicians to advise parents undergoing IVF treatment to select embryos that do not contain a genetic condition that may cause a severe disability.

- The rationale uses ‘deafness’ as an example.

- The HEFB attempts to control the birth of certain genetic conditions but the Deaf community response challenges how one life is of less value than the other.

Ethnorelational conflict

- Sexual abuse on a large scale is an act of sexual slavery opposed to random events. Large scale abuse of Deaf children in education (in Ireland and Italy) is of concern. Deaf children are targeted because of their lack of speech or communication.
Conclusion

• Ethnosexuality forms ethnic boundaries where approved sexual behaviours are set.

• Movement across these barriers are evident in mixed families and sometimes in mono-cultural families.

• Any form of sexual invasions is an act of war on the ethnic group.

• There is a shared global identity amongst Deaf people and an opportunities for international relations.

A future?

• An emerging political Deaf.

• A potential Deaf resurgence.

• More attempts to colonise deaf people who genetic screening, stem cells, and genetic testing.

• UN Convention of Rights for Persons with Disabilities (ratified by UK in June 2009).

Seasonal Greetings and Best Wishes for the New Year.

j.walker@sussex.ac.uk