2012-01-01

Deaf Culture: The Creation of Self and Socialization Through the Use of Sign Language

Marisela Garcia
University of Texas at El Paso, bozmg7@sbcglobal.net

DEAF CULTURE: THE CREATION OF SELF AND SOCIALIZATION

THROUGH THE USE OF SIGN LANGUAGE

MARISELA GARCIA

Department of Communication

APPROVED:

_____

Stacey Sowards, Ph.D., Chair

_____

Eduardo Barrera, Ph.D.

_____

Robert L. Gunn, Ph.D.

_____

Benjamin C. Flores, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

DEAF CULTURE: THE CREATION OF SELF AND SOCIALIZATION
THROUGH THE USE OF SIGN LANGUAGE

by

MARISELA GARCIA, BA

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Communication

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2012

Acknowledgements

The motivating force behind everything I do is love, my love for God, my love for others and my love for myself. My greatest accomplishments have come from my drive to live a life of influence and affect the world around me. My successes have not been accomplished on my own. I've had the love, support and encouragement of many. My family and friends have been my number one fans, but my primary strength has come from God. I am a woman of faith. He has blessed me in so many ways. I credit everything I do to Him. He's given me purpose and vision and everything I need to fulfill them. I am His number one fan.

To my parents, thank you for your endless love and support throughout this journey. If you were to ask my parents what motivates them to work hard every day, they would say, living the good life. I am fortunate to have experienced the growth of my family. From living in apartments in the poor side of town to owning two homes, from wearing hand-me-down clothes to donating clothes to charity, from using their legs as transportation to owning cars, my parents know what it means to work for what you want. . My parents exemplify how great life can be with faith, hard work and perseverance. They have been my foundation, motivation and inspiration.

To my best friend and boyfriend, Eric Ramos, thank you for traveling this journey with me. Graduate school is not only mentally challenging, but an emotional adventure. Through all the craziness of these last two years, Eric kept me grounded and continually re-energized my spirit. He eased my struggles. Whether it was driving to UTEP so I could have a little extra time to do whatever it was I needed to or spending the little time we had together helping me with this project, he continually brightened my days with his jokes and comforted me with his words. Eric has been such an influential person in my life.

Abstract

There is a strong perception of the physicality of disabilities. The review of literature in this project shows that there is a large number of disability related studies in the field of communication that focus primarily on physical and/or visible disabilities. The purpose of this study is to incorporate research on hidden and/or invisible disabilities, specifically deafness. The literature in the field of communication relating to hidden disabilities is limited and much more limited in deaf related research. There are an estimated two thousand deaf individuals in El Paso. Their participation and integration in the community is hindered by societal barriers and attitudes. This is due in part to a lack of recognition that the Deaf culture does exist and a misunderstanding of language versus disability. Therefore, this research paves a way into the culture and specifically looks at sign language and bilingualism on the border. Through ethnography and interviews, this project addressed the following questions: 1) How does the Deaf community in the El Paso borderland region create identities and culture? The framework that supplemented this project was symbolic interactionism, the idea that through language, ourselves and identities are developed. Seven deaf participants were interviewed and based on their responses, there were four themes that emerged from this study: language as identities, situational languages, hidden culture and education as a change agent.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

One in five Americans is a person with a disability, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, making people with disabilities the largest minority group in our nation. It is the only group that anyone can join at any time: at birth or through an accident, illness, or the aging process. This is an influential reality that encourages people like me to find disabilities worthy of study from all perspectives, across all disciplines. In 2001, the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The ICF described how the state of a person's health affects functioning levels of all areas of life. As defined by the ICF, the term "disability" is a general term that refers to impairments affecting the body, activity restrictions to personal daily life functions and participation restrictions in society (Halfon, Houtrow, Larson, & Newacheck, 2010). Research on disabilities is conducted from two approaches: the medical model approach and the social model approach. From the medical model approach, disability is referred to from a health and disease perspective and from a social model approach, disability is perceived as a social construct "defined by social role function, practices of inclusion and exclusion, and discrimination" (Halfon et al., 2012, p. 16). Through an extensive review of literature from the area of communication, it is evident that a great majority of research is focused on the medical and physical conditions of the individual. The problem is that there is more to a human life than our physical and medical conditions.

Cultural and social influences shed light in how we understand people, directly affecting the road to inclusion and integration. A study like this opens our minds and brings awareness to social issues. They go beyond the question of how people with different abilities experience life. They serve as influential tools to bring about change. Historically, people with disabilities have

been frowned upon by society and overly protected by family and caregivers. In recent years, a disabilities movement has fought to change social and physical barriers. *Disability is Natural,* a disability website, states that people with disabilities constitute the largest minority group in the United States and is the most inclusive and most diverse: both genders, any sexual orientation, and all ages, religions, socioeconomic levels, and ethnicities are represented.

Before I get into the discussion on language and culture in relation to deafness, it is important to introduce the terminology that will be used in this study. According to Senghas and Monaghan (2002), there is a development of new terminology in deaf studies involving a significant distinction between the uses of the terms 'Deaf/deaf.' Research has shown that there is a distinction in the way we use the term "deaf." As a result, it is central to establish proper distinctions in the usage of the deaf terminology. "Traditionally, researchers of D/deafness have constructed identity categories in order to research identity and hearing loss. For example, there is a distinction made in the literature between deafness (written with lower case 'd') referring to an audiological state related to having a hearing loss and Deafness (written with an upper case 'D') referring to a marker of a culturally Deaf identity" (Hole, 2007). Senghas and Monaghan (2002) further argued that separating terminology issues such as "measurable hearing levels-deaf and hearing" from "Deaf as sociological or cultural reference" meaning those of socialization, acculturation, and identity makes confusing issues far more understandable. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, I will use "Deaf community" to refer to Deaf culture and identities.

Based on the results in this study, sign language is identified as a way of life for the Deaf community. Participants explain that it defines their culture and who they are as individuals. Therefore, how an individual who is deaf experiences life is based on sign language as the means of communication. There are many aspects of sign language and how it is used to understand the

world around. This extends on the concept that language determines worldviews. Language not only influences our identities, but influences how we view the world. For the purpose of this study, I will look at how identities are influenced through languages. Addressing identities in a plural sense indicates the plurality of perspectives. That is to say that sign language does not define one standard identity within the Deaf community, even as it plays a central role in Deaf culture.

Unlike any other disability, the most common barrier for a deaf individual is language. Similar to many cultures, the Deaf community has its own language. According to Lane, Hoffmesiter, and Bahan (1996), there is an estimated half a million to two million American Sign Language speakers in the United States. The difference is that cultural groups have the capability to learn another language, while the Deaf community's capabilities are limited to sign language. From an independent living perspective, a person who is a wheelchair user or has any other physical disability may face physical barriers of accessibility; however they can communicate their right to equal access. How does an individual who is deaf advocate for their rights? This question is by no means implying that people with one kind of disability face more difficulties than the other. However, it may support the claim that language is a barrier for deaf individuals for full societal integration and independence. And although a barrier, language may be the foundation of the Deaf community and can be vital to the experiences of group culture and self identities.

When we think of culture, we think of ethnic backgrounds, languages and traditions. As defined in the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, culture is "(a) the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group and/or (b) the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time." According to Golos (2010), the Deaf

culture, as in any culture, is a community of people who have their own unique history, literature, theater, traditions, and language. The means of communication of any culture could be the most obvious social form, and a daily characterizing trait of that culture. This is especially true for the Deaf culture and their utilization of sign language as a means of communication: "the use of sign language, although severely oppressed, served to unite a deaf community and contributed to the strength and survival of their culture" (Avon, 2006, p. 188). In terms of culture and communication, this thesis examines how traditions and norms are developed to create the Deaf culture, as well as how those traditions and norms are communicated. Another aspect of this study is to focus on inclusion. Most commonly, there is one person in the family who is deaf, and those individuals deal with how their families and friends accept and are familiarized with Deaf culture.

In looking at previously conducted research on Deaf culture and the Deaf community, there is one prevailing theme: the Deaf community's struggle to separate itself from the disabilities community. Many may perceive sign language as an indicator of disability. However, according to Lane (1992 as cited in Golos, 2010), in the last 15 to 20 years, there has been a transition from labeling deaf people as disabled to recognizing them as bilinguals. We understand bilingual to mean the ability to speak in two languages. Again referencing back to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, language is defined as "(a) the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community, (b) audible, articulate, meaningful sound as produced by the action of the vocal organs; a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings (c) form or manner of verbal expression." The problem with this

definition is that it does not fully encompass how sign languages are used to communicate as a linguistic device, as this study further explores.

The research conducted on sign language is most prevalent in discipline areas such as linguistics and psychology, which chapter 2 illustrates. However, in the field of communication, there is little to no research on sign language and the Deaf culture. When it comes to communication studies, there is greater emphasis on physical and cognitive disabilities. The literature review introduces these studies as a foundation to build on the importance of this study to the communication discipline. The study of sign language in relation to culture and identities is an overarching subject. As a result, this study focuses on and looks specifically at the Deaf culture in the El Paso Border area. Cultural diversity is familiar territory for those who live in a border area and we have become accustomed to different norms, in particular the use of different languages. In mentioning different languages, there is an assumption that we are only talking about the spoken language. However, the reference here is to sign language, the use of different sign languages on the border and the effects of different ethnicities, backgrounds, cultural languages and deafness.

Through ethnography and observations of Deaf events around the community, as well as interviews of individuals who are deaf, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ1: How does the Deaf community in the El Paso borderland region create their identities and culture? How is language used in the creation of culture and identities?

> (a) How do different ethnic backgrounds, languages and deafness come together to create a Deaf culture on the border?

> (b) How does bilingualism apply to deaf individuals on the border?

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the purpose of this study is to relate sign language to the creation of Deaf culture. Looking at this from a border culture perspective adds to the significance of this study. In the following chapters, I will summarize disability related studies from the field of communication that mostly emphasizes physical and cognitive disabilities as well as discuss the effectiveness of sign language in creating Deaf identities and culture and the idea of bilingualism as it pertains to sign language and a key component to Deaf culture: the separation from the disabilities community. It is also important to note that there is limited information on border deaf culture. Therefore, this study seeks to look deeper into the notion of border Deaf culture in the El Paso Region.

As a result of observations and participant responses in this study, it becomes evident that sign language defines the Deaf culture and as a defining factor, sign language varies from region to region, therefore creating a diverse Deaf culture. In addition to the results that show the relationship between sign language, culture and identities, there are also three major tensions within the Deaf culture that emerged from participant interviews. First, as previously discussed, is the tension between the disabilities community and the Deaf community. Research has shown the need, on behalf of the Deaf culture, to separate from the "disabled" label. However, politically and socially the Deaf community, like the disabilities community, struggles for equal access and accommodations, which are addressed in the ADA. Second, there are opposing perceptions on the use of the cochlear implant from deaf individuals who use the implant as an assistive technology to communicate, and deaf individuals who hold standards to Deaf pride. Based on the demographics of the participants who addressed this issue, there seems to be a generational factor with this issue. Older deaf individual seem to have negative perceptions toward the implant, while the younger generation is more adaptive to the idea of assistive

6

technologies. Third, there are tensions of identities, particularly with teens and their desire to fit in to the mainstream. These tensions arise between language and actions as definers of identities. These tensions will be addressed and discussed in further detail in chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2010, over 54 million Americans are living with a disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted in 1990, protects and eliminates societal barriers, to include physical and attitudinal barriers. Based on the minimal research from the communication field on disability issues, it is evident that there is great emphasis on the physicality of disabilities. In reference to the current study, it is important to note that deafness falls under the "sensory disability" category and is referred to as a "hidden" or "non-visual" disability. The research on disability related issues is limited and focused on physical disabilities with little to no relation to culture.

2.1   Disabilities in Communication Studies

One of the most researched areas in communication is disabilities and technology as a means of communication. Dr. Ruma Chatterjee from Kidderpore College in India conducted research on assistive technologies available for people with disabilities, disabilities that cover physical, mental, sensory, and emotional or learning difficulties. Chatterjee (2010) explained that there are different types of disabilities that restrict computer use: cognitive impairment and learning disabilities (ex. autism), visual impairments, hearing impairments (ex. deafness) and motor or tactile impairments (ex. paralysis). In his assessment of assistive technologies available to accommodate these disabilities, Chatterjee (2010), argued that "the biggest challenge in computer accessibility is to make resources available to people with cognitive disabilities, particularly those with poor communication skills and those without reading skills" (p. 5). Although a brief description about assistive technologies for deaf individuals is provided, the research continued on with a focus on cognitive disabilities. Moser (2006) conducted a study on what role technologies play in enabling people with disabilities. "The argument is that this

context of mobilization of new technologies works to build an order of the normal and turn disabled people into competent normal subjects" (Moser, 2006, p. 373). The purpose of the study was to "normalize" people with disabilities in a general context, but the analysis only included an interview excerpt from a person in a wheelchair, a physical disability. Therefore the focus on physical disabilities in the area of technology is a big topic in the field of communication.

As previously mentioned, the literature from a cultural perspective on people with disabilities is limited. Additionally, the studies that have been conducted also focus on physical disabilities. Shultz and Germeroth (1998) looked at cartoon humor as a tool to change attitudes towards disabilities. "Gag cartoons, as a particular genre of humor, provide a unique form of public argument" (Shultz & Germeroth, 1998, p. 229). The study identified 38 cartoons of John Callahan, a cartoonist who is quadriplegic, that focused on people with physical disabilities, including people who are blind, deaf, paraplegic and quadriplegic. These cartoons are analyzed from the basis of identification, logic and language, utilizing the rhetorical theories of Stephen Toulmin on practical reasoning and of Kenneth Burke on terministic screens. According to Shultz and Germeroth (1998), disability-rights advocates have fought for greater access by the removal of environmental barriers. "Using a wheelchair does not, in and of itself, keep someone unemployed and in poverty. But the fact that transportation, workplaces, schools, stores, homes and churches were all inaccessible meant that anyone using a wheelchair became a social outcast" (Pelka, 1966, p. 26-27). Of the 38 cartoons which featured people with all kinds of disabilities; as described above, the three cartoons used in the article illustrate only people in wheelchairs.

9

Similar to the context of these studies, Lindemann and Cherney (2008) observed communicative practices of a wheelchair rugby team. In the study, they explored how talk and stories on and off the court shape the understanding of the self and others. The research involved three years of ethnographic observation of two United States Rugby teams and interviews. From a communication perspective, this study is the only similar study that involves analysis of communication practices of people with disabilities in order to understand a culture. However, again, the focus is on physical disabilities.

Reviewing the existing literature in communication is of particular importance to this study and its significance. This study seeks to more beyond the physical disability and communication. Davi Kallman, an advocate for those with disabilities, focused her graduate research on hidden and/or invisible disabilities. Her research emphasized learning disabilities in relation to higher education. Although the focus of her master's thesis was on college students with learning disabilities, the research on hidden disabilities is relevant for deafness in the area of communication. In her research, Kallman defines and distinguishes visible and invisible disabilities in accordance with communication studies. Visible disabilities are physical disabilities that are seen by society. For example, people in wheelchairs, people with cerebral palsy, people with Down syndrome. Invisible disabilities are those that are not obviously seen, for example, learning, mental and sensory disabilities. Based on these two distinctions, both learning disabilities and deafness are categorized as invisible and/or hidden disabilities   "The communication and disability literature focus particularly on one group of stigmatized individuals. Even though there are different types of disabilities, society lumps disabled into one category…physically disabled" (p. 47). Along with Kallman's research, my study will give way

to hidden or non-visual disabilities, such as deafness, and provide a cultural analysis from a communication perspective.

2.2 Language

This thesis focuses on how people who are deaf create Deaf identities and culture through the use of sign language. "Deafness is a social construction and understanding the complex nature of communities with deaf members requires attending to how people use and think about language; we need to understand more about the culture of language" (Senghas and Monaghan, 2002, p. 70). Language is vital in the creation of a culture and only when we understand its social construction, do we understand how language contributes to culture and identities. Najarian (2008) argued that language is a key aspect of identity construction. It is through language we define who we are as an individual. Azmuddin and Ibrahim (2011) explained that through language an individual's identity is recognized and through common language there is a feeling of belonging. If this is true for a spoken language, then it is relevant for non-verbal forms of languages. Lane, et al. (1996) described American Sign Language as "a complete, natural language, quite independent of English" (p. 43). Brevnik (2005) argued that the practice of sign language creates strong social and cultural bonds between deaf people worldwide. These social and cultural bonds are similar defining traits as those of ethnic cultures. According to Hole (2007), deaf individuals who identify themselves as culturally Deaf have their own language as well as have norms and values that are ascribed to their culture, including high value of Deaf identities, group loyalty, and the value of marrying within one's minority group. Looking into the socialization and enculturation processes through the use of language is important for deaf people because they enable the development of self identity (Sutton-Spence, 2010). According to Kyle and Pullen (1988), life experiences are built into the language which in turn is learned

11

through the use in context, therefore functioning as a cultural group, creating a sense of attitude, shared belief, common life experience and language use.

Aside from cultural unity based on sign language alone, there is also the factor of bilingualism and what that means to the Deaf culture. It is "proposed that the American Deaf community is a language minority group and one needs to be socially deaf in order to be considered as part of the community. They define 'deaf people' as native users of American Sign Language (ASL) who learned it from other deaf people , represent a linguistic minority group of ASL users and participate in American deaf community" (Rosen, 2003, p. 931-932). Bilingualism in relation to the Deaf culture has only recently been studied. What labels deaf individuals as bilingual is their use of both ASL and English. According to Grosjean (2010), individuals who use two languages regularly are bilingual. He explained that proficiency in both languages is not necessary to be bilingual. Many of us are unaware of the fact that ASL is a separate language with its own grammar, something very different from the English language. According to Lane et al. (1996), aside from differences in grammatical structures, some of the behavioral differences in the Deaf community in contrast from U.S. American society are length of eye contact time, facial expressions and distance between individuals in face to face interactions. In his work, *Studying Bilinguals*, Grosjean (2008) outlined the similarities and differences between hearing bilinguals and deaf bilinguals. The similarities between the two include: a) diversity, b) both hearing and deaf bilinguals may not consider themselves bilingual because they do not fully master the languages and c) the way in which both bilingual groups use the languages for different purposes. Until recently, there was little recognition that deaf individuals were bilingual, deaf individuals continue to be bilingual throughout their lives, from generation to generation and deaf bilinguals refuse to speak because of negative feedback.

12

The term codeswitching is most widely studied in linguistic studies, particularly bilingualism. Codeswitching is studied from a "social linguistic perspective" and is defined as the switching or changing from one language to another (Andrews & Rusher, 2010, p. 411).An example of this is switching out a word or phrase to another language, then switching back to the original language. This includes what is known in the Southwest as TexMex or Spanglish, which is the switching from English to Spanish in a single conversation. On a daily basis, deaf individuals codeswitch from communicating in sign language to writing and reading in English to the language that is spoken at home. Grosjean (2010) explained the necessity of this kind of bilingualism in that that much like hearing bilinguals; deaf bilinguals come from diverse language experiences at home, whether there is only spoken English or spoken Spanish. Grosjean concluded that the deaf bilingual must become bilingual by necessity, both in sign language and English and/or Spanish to "survive in the Deaf and hearing worlds" (p. 420).

Codeswitching, or bilingualism, is then determined by the situation and communication taking place. "Deaf adult bilinguals and young deaf emerging bilinguals use language along a continuum that is shaped by three factors: (a) whom they are communicating with (a deaf or hearing person), (b) what they are communicating about (social matters, work, or other topics), and (c) their language histories and language education" (Andrews and Rusher, 2010, p. 409). For example, if a deaf adult is communicating with a hearing person, they would not use ASL, but may use gestures or facial expressions instead. At home, a deaf individual may use home sign, whereas at work or a professional setting may communicate in ASL.

Although this codeswitching exists with deaf individuals, much like the hearing individual, there is usually one language that is native and dominant. Andrews and Rusher (2010) explained that deaf bilinguals are exposed to a signing English code or contact signing at

13

home. At school they are exposed to ASL, spoken and written English, signing codes of English and fingerspelling, but English is not the dominant language. The dominant language is the language that is native, that is common among other deaf individuals and that comes naturally. From a communicative approach, my study will look at how sign language enables the development of not only individual identities but culture as a whole.

2.3   Deaf Culture vs. Disabilities Community

From gathering literature on the topic of Deaf identities, one key point is evident, that the Deaf community has separated itself from the disabilities population. Focusing on this point brings validity to the notion that the Deaf community is a culture in and of itself, separate from any other culture. Among the Deaf community there is discourse that being deaf is not to be disabled but being part of a linguistic minority (Skelton & Valentine, 2003). As Hott (2007) described it, sign language is a visual language. Skelton and Valentine (2003) stated that part of their culture is to affirm being deaf and to reject the notion of being disabled. As they see themselves outside the campaigns for disability rights and attempts to create a separatist culture, the Deaf culture is a source and site for Deaf rights and acts as an important source of support and information for deaf people (Skelton & Valentine, 2003). Through this study, I hope to clearly define the distinctions between the Deaf culture in relation to the disabilities culture. Deaf people are constructed as 'disabled' by political, economic, and social practices. How they represent themselves has little meaning when they need support from the state in order to pursue their education and/or training goals (Skelton & Valentine, 2003).

Researchers have paid little attention to the experiences of deaf individuals and disabled people in general (Skelton & Valentine, 2003). Public perceptions of people with disabilities add to their difficulties in making social contacts and may affect the services available to them

(Wilkinson and McGill, 2008). In the United States, the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 reflects a significant change in societal views toward people with disabilities from a frame in which people with disabilities are needy and pitiful to a frame in which they are entitled to human rights and full civic and social participation (Soffer, Rimmerman, Blanck & Hill, 2010). The Act was primarily crafted by disability rights activists who tried to bring about significant change by eliminating many societal barriers that people with disabilities faced (Haller, Dorries, & Rahn, 2006). Soffer, Rimmerman, Blanck and Hill (2010) explained that "this approach parallels individuals with disabilities to other minority and socially disadvantaged groups, shifting the understanding of the origins of disability to the socio-political arena" (p.688). The disability initiative includes the promoting and securing of human and civil rights, as well as community integration and independent living. Avon (2006) proposed that "deaf people do not see themselves as having a disability to overcome as if society were to recognize the medical condition of deafness as separate from Deafness as a culture, the validity of sign language and proof of a distant culture would not be necessary" (p. 201).

2.4 Deaf Culture on the Border

Similar to ethnic and racial minority groups, the Deaf community faces challenges associated with social discrimination, assimilation and acceptance. "A common theme shared by several individuals involves several experiences relating to dealing with perceptions other people had about them, or with the behavior of others towards them. Often, these perceptions were stereotypical or discriminatory. It was sometimes difficult to determine if the problems were due to their race or their deafness" (Anderson and Miller, 2009, p. 31). According to Hole (2007), deaf people do not want to be fixed; rather they want to be respected as a linguistic, cultural minority and treated equally in relation to the hearing majority. Proponents of this position

advocate co-existence and integration, not assimilation. According to Anderson and Miller (2005), the American Deaf community has become increasingly multicultural, the tasks of appreciating its diversity and weaving together the common threads necessitate that one first understand the commonalities shared by the diverse groups within that community. The identities and culture of Deaf people is complex. Members of the Deaf community frequently live bicultural lives (Sutton-Spence & Muller de Quadros, 2005); however biculturalism does not necessarily mean inclusion of the disability culture. Grosjean (2008) provided three factors of what constitutes biculturalism: 1) taking part to various degrees in the life of two or more cultures, 2) adopting attitudes, behaviors, values and languages to those cultures, and 3) combining and blending aspects of those cultures.

The Deaf community is a community within the border community. "Deaf persons of color maintain boundaries and interact in multiple cultures—their own hearing racial or ethnic group, their Deaf racial or ethnic group, the mainstream Deaf community, and the mainstream, predominately White, hearing community" (Sass-Lehrer et al., 1995 as cited in Anderson & Miller, 2005, p. 31). Not only do individuals who are deaf face the challenges that come with living with a disability, but also the challenges of racial and ethnic barriers. Language barriers, such as sign language and bilingualism, are most evident in the Deaf culture. Bishop and Hicks (2005) categorized both ASL and Spanish as minority languages, although there are a large number of individuals who use these languages. They go on to explain that the communities that use these languages have been marginalized in one way or another. "The Deaf community is characterized by a language and a culture of its own; they have suffered such discrimination and prejudice in the domains of education and employment; they have adopted many of the majority's negative attitudes toward their language and culture; and many of them are, to some

extent at least, bilingual" (Grosjean, 1982, p. 88 as cited in Bishop and Hicks, 2005, p. 198).The basis of bilingualism, as explained by Sklair and Muller Quadros (2004), is exemplified in aspects like assimilation into the mainstream for the purpose of socializing, community participation, and unifying a multilingual, multiethnic, multinational society.

The new understanding of deafness as cultural diversity promotes messages of achievement and potential, however, future research in deaf people as a linguistic, social and cultural group is unclear (Young, 1999; Rosen, 2003). Therefore, I think it is relevant to build on the parallels between the deaf cultural and the border culture. Like spoken languages, sign languages may not directly relate to national or geographic boundaries, but language distinctions can be affected by these boundaries (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). From this, I hope to analyze whether the Deaf community on the border differs from the Deaf community in other parts of the country. The literature on the relationship between the two cultures is limited. "Despite early anthropological references to deaf people using language patterns distinct from their hearing counterparts, focused and extended attention on d/Deaf individuals or communities outside the United States still remains limited" (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002, p. 76). As a result, this research will advance Deaf identities research by incorporating border identities.

The research conducted in this study will seek to emphasize these notions emphasized by the Deaf community: separate from the disabilities culture and co-existence in the community. "Various organizations for Deaf people reflected the diverse interests and experiences of the community, but all shared a common use of an appreciation for signed communication" (Burch, 2000, p. 451). According to Sutton-Spence (2010), deaf people know how to recognize and participate in Deaf culture, especially through sign language…all deaf people need help being socialized into the Deaf community, and they often find this guidance in Deaf clubs. In these

clubs, newcomers to the Deaf community are enculturated by more veteran members" (Sutton-Spence, 2010, p. 266). Sites of socialization are key contributors to the Deaf culture. Extracurricular activities provide an avenue for socialization, shared experience, achievement, and distinction (Luckner & Muir, 2002). Therefore, through observations of monthly Deaf events in El Paso and interviews with people who are deaf, I hope to bring insight to this unrecognized culture. Deaf events are chosen as places for observation as these events are heavily attended not only by individuals who are deaf, but their family and friends as well.

In summary, Brueggemann (1999) as cited in Rosen (2003) offered three different constructions of deafness. They are deafness as disability, as pathology and as culture. The construction of deafness as disability refers to deaf people's experiences of social and educational discrimination and segregation. The construction of deafness as pathology deals with the medical condition of hearing difficulties. The deafness-as-culture construction is grounded on the language, community and culture of deaf people. In relation to Bruggemann's constructions of deafness, this study will focus on deafness as disability and deafness as culture. Due to the extensive research on deafness as pathology, I will look at the different angles of deafness to diversify the research in the area of communication, in relation to disabilities and deafness. The follow section is a discussion of the theoretical framework. Symbolic interactionism supplements the research at hand by providing a cultural identities framework from the individual to the social, communal level. The Deaf community can be analyzed from the perspective of a community made up of individuals or from the perspective of individuals who make up the community.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1   Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism provides a framework for communication theory. Its supporters maintain that many of the more specific theories of communication, language, and socialization are under symbolic interaction (Jamieson, 1977). A brief overview of the theory focuses on the way people interact through symbols, how meanings evolve from those interactions and through those interactions there is development of social structures and self-concepts.

This theory consists of three core principles: meaning, language and thought. These core principles lead to conclusions about the creation of a person's self and socialization into a larger community (Griffin, 1997). Individuals and/or groups are created through social interaction. According to Hewitt (2000), there are three basic premises of symbolic interactionism (as cited in Armstrong, n.d.). First, human beings act toward things and/or experiences on the basis of the meanings those things and/or experiences have for them. Second, the source of meanings for things and/or experiences is derived from or arises out of social interaction with others. Third, the meanings of things/experiences are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the individual in dealing with the things he/she encounters. Someone's meaning is interpreted through social interactions, and the communication and understanding of verbal and non-verbal symbols, such as language (Charon, 2001 as cited in Licqurish & Seibold, 2011). Symbols are socially created and used to represent shared meanings among members of societies and/or cultural groups (Burbank & Martins, 2009). Two major contributors to the theory are George Herbert Mead, who founded the basic principles of the theory, and Herbert Blumer, who built on Mead's concepts. According to Manning and Smith (2010), George Herbert Mead intended to show that a person's sense of self is formed or developed through the norms and

values of the different groups that person associates themselves with. Therefore, "a person's self is not and cannot be present at birth. Rather, Mead suggests, it emerges during 'social experience and activity.' These experiences and activities take place in groups and the socialization and later internalization of group standards is a prerequisite for group membership" (p. 44-45). Importantly, the norms and values of these groups are internalized to a person's sense of self and go beyond something that is just learned.

According to Mead (1967), the language process is essential for the development of the self and it is the social process that is responsible for the appearance of the self. It is through language and the meanings that arise from language interactions that the self is identified. Mead introduces two general stages in the full development of the self. The first stage is when the self is influenced and affected by particular attitudes of other individuals toward him or herself and toward one another. The second stage in the full development of the self is influenced and affected by both the particular individual attitudes and the attitudes of the generalized other. Mead (1967) refers to the generalized other as the whole community or the social group to which he/she belongs to, whose attitudes influences one's self. "As the human individual becomes conscious of himself, he also becomes conscious of other individuals; and his consciousness both of himself and of other individuals is equally important for this own self-development and for the development of the organized society or social group to which he belongs" (Mead, 1967, p. 253). This development process then functions through the use of language. The understanding and use of common language helps us attain meaning through socialization and communication between people. Mead (1967) argued that humans are dependent on the development of language to form social groups, or for our purposes, distinctive cultures. Social interaction occurs through commonality and unity of language. If the unity and commonality of language does not exist,

Mead suggested that, "one may seemingly have the symbol of another language, but if he has not any common ideas (and these involve common responses) with those who speak that language, he cannot communicate with them" (p. 259). Mead further explained that there is a need for common interests, common cooperative activity, social interaction, and the meanings, language and thought derived from those interactions are dependent on common attitudes, meanings, ideas and responses.

In relation to sign language as a contributor to Deaf culture and identities, the three premises of social interactionism can be applied. An individual who is deaf (human being) acts towards sign language (things/experiences) on the basis of the meanings that sign language (things/experiences) has for them. The source of meaning for sign language is derived from or arises out of social interactions with others. The meaning of sign language is handled in an interpretive process used by the individual in dealing with sign language encounters. These three premises, as modified to fit the study at hand, are in connection to answer how sign language creates Deaf identities and culture.

3.2   Method

Following the model found in Lindlof and Taylor (2011), the research method utilized in this study was ethnography and open-ended interview questions. The ethnographic research was conducted by observing interaction among deaf individuals prior to the interviews. For the purpose of this study, Deaf observations included cultural themes such as creating, re-establishing or encouraging the Deaf culture. Through these interactions, I observed the socialization process into the Deaf culture and the role socialization played in defining Deaf identities. Surrounding cultural formation, the set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, and statements produce a particular understanding of an event, person or

experience (Hole, 2007 citing Burr, 1995). This concept of how images, representations and

meanings give understanding of events led me to choose ethnography as a method for study.

Along with the ethnographic approach, I used open-ended questions in a semi-formal interview

structure to better understand how sign language is a contributor to Deaf identities. Cultural

representations and language are tools with which we construct meaning, and therefore we

constitute ourselves and identities in the stories we tell; in our talk both to ourselves and to others

(Hole, 2007 citing Gergen, 1999; Gergen 2001). The survey questions stemmed from a culture

model suggested by Senghas and Monaghan (2002) as a theoretical framework for analyzing

Deaf communities. "When individuals or groups accept sign languages, other language

associated practices are also recognized, including traditional story-telling patterns of greetings,

introductions, and word-play," thus the cultural or social cultural model of d/Deafness as

explained by Senghas and Monaghan (2002). In relation to this cultural model, Fletcher-Carter

(1997) suggested dimensions of culture which the questions in the survey were based on.

Dimensions include: a) cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors, b) ethnic identity or the

subjective sense of ethnic group membership and c) the experiences associated with minority

status and transforming life events. From the argument posed by Gergen (1999; 2001), it is

evident that when we engage in talk, identities are established. Therefore, the interviewing

method was chosen to complement the ethnographic approach. The interviews were conducted in

person, unless otherwise requested by the participant. Due to the participants' deafness, the

interviews were conducted with the assistance of an interpreter and lasted approximately an hour.

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Texas at

El Paso.

3.2.1 Deaf Coffee Social

During the time of observations of the Deaf Coffee Socials, I took the role of a non-participant observer, in which I only observed behaviors without any active involvement with deaf individuals. The Social took place in the lobby of a church where the coffee shop and lounging area were located. There were about fifty to seventy people. The majority were individuals who are deaf. However, attendees also included hearing individuals. The ages of the attendees ranged from young children about seven years old to older adults, approximately 60 years old and there was a balance of males and females. An interesting observation to point out is the diversity of races in that there were Hispanics, African Americans and Anglos present at these events.

3.2.2 One-on-One

The observations during the socials were more general. During the one on one interviews, time allowed for more specific and detailed observations. There were five very different meetings when it came to the interviews. The meetings took place at the same location, a location that is common and familiar to all the parties involved. It is interesting to note that before every interview session, during the sessions and after the sessions, there was socialization that took place. I am referring to the interactions between the participants and their family members who accompanied them and the topics of conversation. Each description includes details about the individuals themselves, interactions and conversation topics. It is vital to include and explain the stories, opinions, ideas and conversations shared as a result from the interview questions. I refer to these as "side conversations." This means that these are some of the things that are not in direct relation to the questions, but worth noting for the purpose of gaining more knowledge about the culture.

I conducted seven in person interviews. Each of these interviews was in-depth. Of the seven interviews, one participant lives in South Dakota, and three participants have lived in other cities, so they have experienced different Deaf environments. The participants included three males and four females. Three of the participants fell in the age range from 18-24 and the other particants were in the range of 25-60. One participant was African American; one was Anglo and the others were Mexican American. Each one of the participants indicated the United States was their native country.

The hour-long interviews included conversations particularly relating to the interview questions. Before the interview sessions started, each participant was given a consent form (See Appendix A). It was explained to them and they were asked to sign once they were in agreement and wanted to proceed with the interview. An interpreter was present at each interview session. Mr. Randy Thrash, who is deaf, is an advocate for the Deaf community. Although he is deaf, he is able to read lips and speak fluent English. He assisted with the interpretation.

The interview questions were grouped as followed: questions 1-4 asks for demographic information, questions 5 through 10 focus directly with language and bilingualism, and questions 11 through 17 regard the Deaf culture, social issues and identity (See Appendix B). The overall language background to each participant was similar. When asked the question of how many languages they speak, each participant stated at least two languages: English and American Sign Language or Spanish and American Sign Language. Two of the participants stated they understood some Mexican Sign Language that they picked up from living on the border. When asked which language they consider their native language, four stated American Sign Language, one stated Home Sign, one stated English and another stated Spanish. Each participant explained that they learned sign language from school or private tutoring lessons at a young age. One

participant explained he learned sign language as an adult. When it comes to the sign language

they associated themselves with more: American Sign Language or Mexican Sign Language, all

participants indicated American Sign Language. However, it was also stated that MSL is

prevalent on the border, but the majority of the individuals who come to the United States learn

ASL.

Once the interview process was over, I grouped everyone's answers to the corresponding

interview question. After collecting the data and grouping the answers together, there were

relating themes that developed based on the responses to the questions. After looking over the

data from the observation and the responses from the interview questions, there are four

emerging themes that evolved: language identities, bilingualism, culture and education. These

themes were analyzed in a context to answer the following research question: How does the deaf

community in the El Paso borderland region create their identities and culture through the use of

non verbal communication: sign language? More specifically, how vital is language in the

creation of culture and identities, how do different ethnic backgrounds, languages and deafness

come together to create a deaf culture on the border and how does bilingualism apply to deaf

individuals on the border? These four themes were used to analyze how meanings are created

through symbolic interactions.

Chapter 4: Analysis

The Deaf culture is like any other culture in its complexities. However, what differentiates the Deaf culture from others is its diversity in people, race, ethnicity and most notably, its language. The culture is described as a community within the larger community. Unlike any other culture, there are no similar physical traits or descriptions to describe the typical deaf individual as one could, for example, describe race or ethnicity using physical characteristics. What defines the Deaf culture are both language and social interactions. In the following section, I will describe observations from a Deaf Coffee Social, as well as descriptions of social interactions among the individuals who participated in the interviews. The following are the observations gathered prior to the interview, during the interview and after the interview. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed for interesting observations of socialization and cultural themes. Before I go into analyzing the data collected, it is vital to describe the diversity of the individuals, so that we can better understand the themes presented in this thesis: culture, communication and bilingualism.

4.1   Deaf Coffee Social Observation

There were a lot of integrated conversations between individuals who are deaf and hearing individuals. A few conversations took place with the assistance of an interpreter, but for the most part, the hearing individuals knew sign language. P7 explained that the individuals were using American Sign Language and some were using what is referred to as home sign. Home sign is sign language that is learned at home and differs from person to person depending on the signs learned in each household. In observing the way individuals signed to one another, there were a lot of facial expressions, body gestures and moving of the lips. The environment was animated. Everyone was laughing, smiling and having a good time. From the body language, it

seemed the conversations were entertaining. It looked as if everyone knew each other. No one seemed out of place or like they were there for the first time. There was familiarity, common interests and membership.

4.2   One-on-One Observation

There was a significant emphasis on parental involvement and its effects on socialization and communication. Because parental involvement was credited as being one of the foundations for both social and communication development, particularly in the Deaf culture, it will be factored in to the following observations. Not all the participants offered information regarding their parents' involvement; however a description is provided for those who did voluntarily provide such information. Understanding the background of these individuals, in terms of family support, directly relates to the themes developed based on the participants' responses to the interview questions. It is through these communicative processes that we can understand some of the issues faced by the Deaf community.

The following are detailed assessments of each participant. The sections are divided in three: a) interview session 1, b) interview session 2, and c) interview session 3. In order to keep clear descriptions of the participants, I have assigned the following pseudonyms for each:

1) P1- Participant 1 refers to the deaf young mother with her baby girl.

2) P2- Participant 2 refers to the deaf mother-to-be.

3) P3- Participant 3 refers to the deaf Spanish speaking woman in her forties.

4) P4- Participant 4 refers to the deaf professional from South Dakota.

5) P5- Participant 5 refers to the deaf woman with her Spanish speaking mother.

6) P6- Participant 6 refers to the deaf father with his deaf children.

7) P7- Participant 7 refers to the deaf man who participated in the interviews and also took the role as the official interpreter for this study.

4.2.1 Interview Session 1

The first interview session involved two female deaf participants. This session took place in a conference room and there was an area of the room that was designated for the one-on-one interviews. Although there were two participants involved in this specific session, the interviews were conducted with each participant separately, away from everyone else. These participants were in their late teens or early twenties. P1 was a single mother, who brought her baby girl with her. The baby was a hearing child. The mother was deaf and as an adult had decided to use a cochlear implant as an assistive device to communicate. I noted that this decision to use a cochlear implant was made as an adult because it is common among deaf children in hearing families to wear a cochlear implant as toddlers to provide better communication with their children. In the case of P1, her parents gave her the opportunity to make her own decision about the implant once she was older and understood its purpose and function for communicating. At this session, she was not wearing the implant and communicated with me through the assistance of an interpreter. Throughout my interview with P1, she attended to her baby. When first coming in to the session, the baby was in the car seat. When P1 got situated, she took her baby out of the car seat and held her in her arms. The baby was active, like any typical baby. She was playful and made sounds, what some may refer to as baby talk. The interaction between the mother and the child was similar to the interaction between a hearing mother and child.   Many mothers depend on their sense of hearing in order to take care of their children such as the use of baby monitors when a mother is asleep in her room, doing laundry or washing dishes. They can hear if their baby fusses or cries while they are accomplishing another task. This convenience is not so

easily accessible for the deaf mother. In communicating with the interpreter, P1 was able to sign with her baby in her arms, mostly with one hand and facial expressions. When it came time for the interview, she put the baby back in the car seat. She left the baby in the care of her friend while I conducted the interview. During the interview, there was one instance when the baby was crying in her car seat, which was placed to the side of the mother. She did not hear the baby crying and had to be notified. Like any other mother, she picked the baby up and rocked her to get her to calm down. She did not speak to the baby, but used her facial expressions to communicate and comfort her baby.

The other participant in this session was P2, a mother-to-be and her boyfriend, who was also deaf. The woman used a cochlear implant and could read lips and was able to vocally communicate. Due to her oral language skills, she was able to communicate with me without the assistance of the interpreter. At first, she felt embarrassed to use her voice. However, once she felt comfortable with me, she was able to vocally express herself. In order to establish that comfort, I applied the rules for communicating with a deaf individual. This included establishing eye contact and speaking to the person, rather than speaking to the interpreter. I made sure to carefully and slowly speak in order for her to be able to read my lips. Her pronunciation and articulation was clear. She credited this to private tutoring, which she received at a young age. She explained that her parents paid for private tutoring for her to learn and speak English, as well as sign language. Her parents do not know sign language and communicate with her in English. This relates back to the idea of a parents' decision versus the child's decision to use cochlear implants. In this case, P2 did not have a choice.   From a young age, she used a cochlear implant, which amplified her hearing. The conversations during this session were very personal. The participants spoke openly about their situations involving relationships and their children.

Another topic that was discussed is the discrimination that exists against deaf individuals and their challenges of being integrated in the community.

4.2.2 Interview Session 2

The second interview session was with P3, a single Spanish speaking woman in her forties, accompanied by her teenage daughter. She became deaf later in life. Her daughter was a hearing individual who knows little ASL. The communication between her and her mom involved lip reading and gestures. The most interesting thing about this woman was the complexities of the languages she spoke. She considered her native language to be Spanish and spoke little English. However, her signing was ASL. She was able to read lips in Spanish and vocally speak Spanish. In instances when she needed more clarification on a question, she and the interpreter would sign in ASL. She knew little of Mexican Sign Language (MSL). Much like Spanish speakers, she was very animated in her signing. By focusing on her animations and gestures, one could get a general idea of what she was trying to say. For the most part, I could look at her, without the assistance of the interpreter and understand her message. It was very interesting to observe someone speaking Spanish while simultaneously signing in ASL. Her side conversations emphasized the challenges of being deaf and the need and demand for more interpreters to help with the integration of both the deaf and hearing communities.

4.2.3 Interview Session 3

Another interview I conducted was through the use of video phone with P4, a professional in South Dakota. The interview with this man was strictly through the assistance of an interpreter. This man lived in El Paso, Texas and spent a great deal of time working with the deaf individuals in this community. Parental involvement was evident in the case of this participant. His parents are able to hear, but learned sign language to be able to communicate

with him. Therefore, communication was active in his home. There was support and encouragement from his parents as they were active in his education. He explained that one can assume whether parents are involved with their deaf children based on their grammatical structures in both sign language and written English. This participant was educated and provided more educated responses to the questions, while the other participants answered from personal perspectives. This participant addressed differences between accommodations and deaf acceptance where he lives now and those that fail to exist in El Paso.

4.2.4   Interview Session 4

The fourth interview session was a little more diverse. P5 was a deaf woman with her Spanish speaking mother, who also did not know ASL. Much like the previously mentioned mother-daughter pair, they communicated through gestures, facial expressions and lip reading. P7 mentioned that this woman's mother is over protective in comparison to the participant discussed earlier. There was a sense of dependency. In the case of this woman, there was a lack of communication at home. This participant was born deaf. Spanish is the language spoken at home; English was spoken and learned at school. There was no exposure to the English language at home, which then affected her literacy level, meaning that she reads and writes from a sign language foundation. When she is at home, she and her mother face not only a language barrier, but a communication barrier. She is currently a student at El Paso Community College and is taking remedial courses to strengthen her literacy level and her English capacity. When I noticed the pair sitting in the waiting area, reading magazines, I heard the mother speaking Spanish, some English, and the daughter responding with some sign language but mainly pointing and gestures. During the interview process, this participant would read my lips, however she did not feel comfortable to speak out loud.

This participant discussed many challenges she has faced in the community, one specifically is at restaurants and fast food chains. She and the interpreter, who is also an advocate for the Deaf community, began discussing issues related to accommodations and access. She explained that in different parts of the United States, fast food restaurants provide a touch screen order pad at the drive through. I found this especially important to note because the advocate explained he would set up meetings with managers and CEOs so this participant could explain the need for these order pads. She is credited for recommending this solution to the problem. In regards to the Deaf community, there is a perception of "complain and do nothing." The fact that this participant is initiating change and advocating for herself is uncommon among deaf individuals. In conducting interviews and spending some time with deaf individuals, there are few who initiate change. Change agents are not common in the Deaf community. This entire conversation was then translated to Spanish to explain to the mother what was being said and the plans being made for this initiative.

4.2.5 Interview Session 5

The following interview was with P6, a deaf father and his two deaf children, a boy and a girl. The children were not interviewed, but it was interesting to see their interaction. The mother of these children is also deaf. P7 explained that the father is the only deaf person in his extended family. However, on the mother's side, her mother and sister are deaf. Therefore, deaf gene comes from the mother. This is a unique situation where both the parents and the children are deaf. It was explained that both parents are very involved with their children. Their mother encourages personality and independence, while their father encourages discipline and good behavior. This is reflected in the characters of both children who were very outgoing and social. The language spoken at home for this family is sign language. Therefore, communication is

32

evident and a major contributor to the development of skills. Both the boy and the girl were doing homework during the interview. Interestingly, they automatically assumed that I was deaf and started to sign to me. Once they realized that I was not deaf, they kept to themselves. It was not until we initiated a conversation with them, that they started to open up. Our form of communicating was writing on paper and using gestures. When the children started to get up and run around, the father would use dramatic, very noticeable gestures to get their attention. In one instance, the little girl took a sheet of paper from a notebook that did not belong to her. It was explained that one of the characteristics of the Deaf culture is this notion of sharing and commonality as well as spoiling children. Another point that P6 made was about the use of two sign languages: ASL and SEE Sign. SEE is an acronym for Signed Exact English. Both of these languages are taught in deaf education programs, which I will discuss later.

One major theme that emerged from my observations is the level of diversity at both the Coffee Social and the one-on-one interviews. Aspects of diversity include languages, ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds. Within these small number of instances of just observing a few individuals, one can imagine how much more diverse the entire community of deaf individuals is. I was able to get a broad spectrum of information from the interviews, due to the diversity of the participants. The data from the observations and the responses from the interview questions lead into the discussion of the four emerging themes: language identities, bilingualism, culture and education.

4.3   Language Defines Identities

Before I get in to the discussion of how language defines identities for deaf individuals, it is important to define language and explain what language means for the Deaf culture. P7 described language as a necessity for socialization with mainstream society. Sign language

33

establishes identities and helps others to recognize that identities. Sign language also provides the means to express individuality not only as a deaf person, but as a person. From the responses gathered during the interviews, some deaf individuals embraced sign language while others emphasized the challenges. Acceptance of language is crucial in defining who a person is, such as both self-acceptance and social acceptance. A decision to live with deafness and embrace sign language can be based on choice or based on fear. Spoken language is such an obstacle and at the same time is so vital for integration and communicating in society. During the interviews, P2 mentioned that some deaf individuals hide their language when they are in public. They feel embarrassed to use sign language when they are around hearing individuals. This is particularly important to note because a person's identities is affected when they are not able to freely and comfortably express themselves in a society that is so interdependent. The mindsets of deaf individuals and hearing individuals are different. P7 gave clarification on what this means by noting that, for example, as a hearing individual, it is easy for to decide to go out with friends one night. However, for a deaf individual, they think about how they will interact and be able to socialize during their night out. P7 identified specific questions that deaf individuals ask themselves when making decisions to go out: Will there be too much noise to be able to catch someone's attention? Will the bartender understand what I want to drink? Will I be able to talk to that person I'm interested in? Relationships are a big part of our lives and communication is vital in maintaining those relationships. Therefore, a deaf individual's capacity to maintain a relationship is limited when there is that language and communication barrier.

P3 described how sign language impacts her socialization in the mainstream. Because of the lack of accommodations, such as readily available sign language interpreters, she said that it makes it harder for her to communicate in public. She relies heavily on the cochlear implant,

which amplifies her hearing, and allows her to communicate verbally making the communication process much easier for herself. She also noted that sign language is tiring to the eyes. One of the major differences in speech and language between the hearing and Deaf communities is the use of auditory and visual. Hearing individuals depend greatly on auditory or verbal gestures, while deaf individuals rely on visual gestures. For example, body language is a big factor in sign language. She explained that this causes many deaf individuals to suffer from sight fatigue due to the amount of concentration and strain on the eyes to read signs.

Language is a form of expressing and communicating in the world we live in. It is through our language that we create identities and share our identities with others. As P5 explained, sign language identifies who she is at home, at school, with friends and in society. Mind, self, and society (i.e. Deaf community) are processes of personal and interpersonal interaction; therefore language is a primary mechanism in the development self and society (Littlejohn, 1977). Studies have shown that language is a defining factor in creating culture. This is no more evident than in the case of sign language and the Deaf culture. Just like spoken languages, it can be considered that language and culture are inseparable, influencing each other (Damian, 2011). According to P2, "sign language is identity; it's how we express ourselves." If an individual does not know the language, his/her identities may not be associated with the Deaf community. This is confirmed by statements made during the interviews. P7 explained that he did not know sign language, so he did not fit in. He was not born deaf. However, as he became deaf, his way of communicating was by reading lips. It was not until he was an adult that he learned sign language. He explained that even though he was deaf, he was not accepted into the Deaf culture because he did not know sign language. He was not able to communicate with the hearing community because he could not hear, and he could not communicate with the Deaf

community because he did not know sign language. This created a sense of isolation which led to his vulnerability to fit in by any means necessary, particularly evident with the Deaf culture.

Due to the language barrier, it is difficult for deaf individuals to fit in to the mainstream society. P7 also explained that deaf individuals, particularly teenagers, begin looking for alternatives to help them fit in, for example, through drinking, smoking, and turning to drugs and sex, all of which hinder their identities as part of the Deaf culture since they are more focused on trying to fit in with mainstream society. As explained by P7, this is so because it is not that they are deaf that allows a deaf individual to fit in; rather it is what they do. His story supported the argument by each individual that sign language defines identities, which relates to the notion of fitting in from the perspective of minority deaf individuals on the border and other regions. As explained during the interviews, in society we need to communicate, therefore language is important. Many deaf individuals learn American Sign Language. However, there are different kinds of sign language from region to region, with different dialects. P4 explained that sign language is regional; it differs from state to state. Individuals, groups and communities differ in the strength of their sense of belonging or association with a cultural group (Fletcher-Carter & Paez, 2010). An interesting distinction explained in the interview is that unlike with spoken languages, when an individual who is deaf comes to the United States, they learn American Sign Language and do not expect Americans who are deaf to learn their regional sign language. Sign languages adapt to location. If there is an emphasis on adapting sign languages to fit the culture of the area, then language plays a significant role in directly creating, shaping and/or modifying culture.

4.4 Situational Language

As previously noted, each participant knew a minimum of two languages. This means that they use sign language and can read and/or understand a different language (i.e. English or Spanish). P4, who is a professional working with the Deaf community and who taught a course on Deaf culture at El Paso Community College, defined the difference between American Sign Language and English. American Sign Language by noting that ASL is not English; it has a special structure compared to English. The grammar and synthetics in the English language are very different from American Sign Language. Because of these differences, these individuals are considered bilingual.

Based on the interviews, there are two factors for this being the case. One of those factors is education and the other is that the language considered to be the native language is usually not the same language spoken at home. In discussing whether the deaf individual is bilingual, each participant explained this to be true. If a person uses sign language and English, Spanish or another language, then they are considered bilingual. However, if they only use sign language, they are not bilingual. In many cases, they are considered to be trilingual. P1 stated that she considers herself trilingual because she speaks both English and Spanish and knows American Sign Language. This mixture of languages can cause confusion and can be a disadvantage for the deaf individual. The deaf education systems in El Paso teach deaf students American Sign Language and SEE Sign in conjunction with English, while at home the primary language may be Spanish with the family knowing little to no sign language. The disadvantage then comes from communication barriers. Education is vital to the proficiency of languages. Due to the mixture and diversity of languages, a deaf individual must have a strong language foundation. This is not only necessary to advance in education, but also advance socially. The deaf culture on

the border is unique in its exposure to different languages, both ASL and MSL and English and Spanish. Deaf individuals on the border struggle more due to lack of formal support, the education system, and informal support at home.

Going back to the notion of parental involvement, on the border there are challenges that arise from speaking multiple languages. The support to learn and assist with the learning of English is limited. In different parts of the United States, where language diversity is not so prevalent, English is more easily mastered by Deaf individuals. Parents are more capable of assisting their deaf children with learning English. As the participants in this study noted, the languages used are generally learned from schooling or private tutoring. Each explained that they learned both sign language and English in school. Due to the lack of fluency of the English language in many deaf families in El Paso, deaf students rely and depend only on what they learn in school without the supplemental help at home. P7 stated that it is common for the few deaf students who decide to go to college to take remedial English courses at community colleges. This is where they gain a better grasp and understanding of language, ASL and English. Deaf students who graduate from high school and do not pursue higher education often fall into illiteracy. The mixture of languages and the confusion that arise from this mixture affects interactions with others and more importantly the integration into mainstream society. For example, filling out job applications, reading signs and/or directions, or the ability to enjoy a movie because there is not a clear understanding of the messages derived from closed captioning, are challenges that arise from illiteracy due to a mixture of languages. The exposure to multiple languages can be beneficial when there is a degree of proficiency, but can also be limiting when Deaf individuals are not able to learn these languages fluently.

Those who acquired the Spanish language or have some knowledge of Spanish learned it from home and acquired it from living on the border. With the exception of one family, each household is diverse in the languages that are spoken at home. The father with the two deaf children, who considers home sign to be his native language, uses American Sign Language at home. The members of this family are all deaf. In the two households of the young women, P1 and P2, the languages spoken are some sign language, English and Spanish. Both these women stated that American Sign Language is their native language. An important note here is that at least one member of the family knows each language. For example, a brother may speak both English and Spanish; the mother only knows Spanish and a cousin might be fluent in American Sign Language. The Spanish speaking mother, who signs in ASL, stated the dominant language spoken at home is Spanish. Her daughter does not sign. Therefore, the communication is primarily through speaking Spanish.

There is evidence that one's self-concept affects how a person chooses to communicate both to him/herself and to other people, in the processing of internal thoughts and emotions, as well as in the selecting of strategies chosen in interaction (Chatham-Carpenter, 2006). The way in which an individual who is deaf communicates through sign language is also a defining factor in relation to identities and culture, especially on the borderland. From the interviews, each person indicated how expressive the Deaf culture is and talked about the "language traditions" of sign language. For example, sign language is very expressive and descriptive; keeping eye contact is crucial and deaf people are blunt and direct. These language traditions also vary region to region. In describing the Deaf culture on the border, each individual emphasized how different the languages are from American Sign Language and Mexican Sign Language and expression. For example, it was stated that the sign language here on the border is a lot more

expressive, uses more body gestures and is more animated. According to Esmail (2008), there is a construction of a positive image of signed languages by nonverbal features of communication, including facial expression, arm and hand movements and body language. These are the actual features of sign language. This became very apparent in the observations at the Deaf Coffee Social. Everyone was very animated and expressive in their conversations. In some instances, a hearing individual has some idea of what is being said through these nonverbal features.

4.5   Hidden Culture

The Deaf community is a culture in and of itself, separate from any other culture. When asked to describe the Deaf culture, the participants similarly described the culture as a community within a larger community. The Deaf culture is a reflection of society as a whole, on a smaller scale. Among deaf individuals there are differences in religions, philosophies, politics, economics, etc. Because it is a relatively small community, most know each other. Members of the deaf community are already isolated from the mainstream due to language and societal barriers. Some are isolated from their families because their family members do not know sign language. Therefore, many of the deaf individuals look to the Deaf community for inclusion, acceptance and participation.

Two of the seven participants consider themselves professionals. Education and life experiences have given them extensive knowledge about the Deaf culture. P4 is currently an instructor who teaches courses on Deaf culture in South Dakota. He previously lived in El Paso and taught at El Paso Community College. Based on his experience and his own research, he explained and addressed five criteria for defining a culture: 1) unifying language, 2) rule of behavior, 3) heritage, 4) artistic expression and 5) identity. By unifying language, he meant a way of communicating and expression ideas, initiatives, problems, struggles, challenges, etc. In

relation to sign language as the unifying language, P3 expressed the struggles the culture faces

due to language. She explained that the lives of deaf individuals are filled with daily struggles.

They are dependent on accommodations such as sign language interpreters and hearing aids. She

used herself as an example. She depends greatly on hearing aids and prefers to communicate

with the assistance of a hearing aid. This participant emphasized the priority to hear and the

ability to make communicating easier rather than trying to struggle without it. The next criterion

is rule of behavior. A culture is distinguished by its actions and behaviors, both amongst

themselves and in society. An example of this in the Deaf culture is visual expression. Under rule

of behavior come the traditions, norms and values of a cultural group. In one of the interview

sessions, P6 stated that a characteristic of the Deaf culture is their stubbornness and the need to

do things on their own rather than ask for help. Because of the diversity of sign languages,

sometimes there are misconceptions or misunderstandings among the Deaf culture as well as

within society. It was also mentioned that a big cultural value is reputation. Due to the

community being small, everyone knows one other and it becomes important to protect their

status. It is perceived that information spreads fast in the Deaf community, which in turn may

lead to gossip. Gossiping seemed to be a popular topic among the participants in describing the

Deaf culture. Heritage is another criterion explained by P7, as culture has history. Heritage for

the Deaf culture involves the struggles against discrimination and fights for equal access and

accommodation in society. Avon (2006) proposed that "deaf people do not see themselves as

having a disability to overcome, if society were to recognize the medical condition of deafness as

separate from Deafness as a culture, the validity of sign language and proof of a distant culture

would not be necessary" (p. 201). P4 explained that in the past, there was a large attendance to

deaf socials because at the time that was the only way to communicate with each other. Now

with technology, they have internet, video phone, and text messaging, so the attendance to deaf socials has decreased. Before technology, the deaf could not participate in society, but now there is more inclusion. Another criterion is artistic expression. There are many deaf individuals who are well-known for their artistry. Artistry includes painters, writers, actors, musicians, artists, singers, etc. There are many deaf individuals who are well-known for their artistry. P4 explained that a culture must have artistry that defines it.   And lastly, a culture must have an identity. This does not refer to individual identities, but a cultural identity. Identity involves characteristics, associations, common traits that identify a culture to the rest of society. An example of this would be that the Deaf culture does not identify with disabilities, but does identify as being a part of a language minority. When it comes to identity, education plays a major factor. Education sparks different conversations and initiations.

Deaf culture is often described as diverse. A statement that came from the interview sessions was: "color of skin does not exist in the Deaf culture, it is not about race" (P4). To expand more on this statement, P7 explained that color and race do exist; however, the purpose for making this statement is to emphasis the tie and bond created among the Deaf culture, which overshadows racial issues that may be evident in other cultures. Interestingly, he labeled the Deaf culture as a "double minority, the "Deaf culture minority." Color is tolerated in the Deaf culture because of one common factor, deafness. Deafness ties individuals together despite race and color. This is most evident on the border. It was explained by P7 that in other cities there is such things as deaf black and deaf white cultures. Gallaudet University is an international school for the deaf attended by people from all over the world. Because of its diversity, a degree of racism exists between the deaf white culture, the deaf black culture and the deaf Mexican culture. This notion of deaf discrimination versus racial discrimination extends from the concept of the

"double minority." Because of the diversity that exists on the border, racial discrimination is not as prevalent in El Paso.

In a general sense, the previous section describes the Deaf culture from the perspective of deaf individuals. However, there are distinctions between the culture in general and the culture on the border. "Deaf persons of color maintain boundaries and interact in multiple cultures— their own hearing racial or ethnic group, their deaf racial or ethnic group, the mainstream Deaf community, and the mainstream, predominately White, hearing community" (Sass-Lehrer et al., 1995 as cited in Anderson & Miller, 2005, p. 31). The two most prevalent differences between the cultures are language and education. As P7 described it, "the primary difference here is the presence of deaf members from Mexico that have zero formal education and sometimes do not have a structured language system. In non-bordering communities the education required and language structure is there." He went on to explain that most deaf individuals from Mexico use what is called "home sign" which is basically gestural communication. P1 explained that deaf individuals do not attend school in Mexico. They cannot read or write in any language so when they come to the United States, there are big language barriers. In the United States, there are more opportunities than in Mexico. Aside from schooling opportunities, the deaf on the border are exposed to diverse languages and adapt to those languages.

In a large number of regions in the U.S., it is essential to know both English and Spanish. Bilingualism is no longer just a border issue. However, in comparison to Mexican Sign Language, unless the deaf individual was born in Mexico and learned Mexican Sign Language, it is not used in the United States. Due to close ties to Mexico, whether with family or friends, the Deaf community on the border is at least somewhat familiar with Mexican Sign Language. This is evident in the fact that these participants have some knowledge of the Mexican Sign

Language, which is not common in any other part of the United States. This concept exemplifies symbolic interactionism. Mead explained that a person's sense of self is formed or developed through the norms and values of the different groups they associate themselves with. P4 explained that sign languages are regional and differ in dialects, similar to other spoken languages. Although other parts of the United States are exposed to different dialects of sign language, it is not compared to experiencing a completely different language from another country. According to symbolic interactionism theory, the diversity of the Deaf culture on the border and the associations to the Mexican Deaf culture are created by integration of sign languages, ASL and MSL, spoken languages, English and Spanish and cultures.

In comparison to other cities in the United States, most are not exposed to the different national sign languages. On the border, the deaf learn different languages such as Mexican Sign Language, American Sign Language and home sign through the use of gesture and facial expressions. This makes the Deaf culture on the border more easily adaptable to languages. However, the opportunities presented in a bordering city, compared to a non-bordering city differ. According to one participant, who teaches Deaf culture and is now living in South Dakota, in El Paso, there are about 2,000 deaf individuals. Of those 2,000 less than eight are professionals. In his current location in South Dakota, there are about 500 deaf individuals, 100 of whom hold professional titles such as CEO and President. In this same conversation, it was noted that El Paso is behind other cities in the United States when it comes to equal access and accommodations.

When asked if these participants identify themselves as been a part of the Deaf culture, a majority of the responses were yes. P2 explained that she grew up with the Deaf culture. It is where the deaf feel comfortable communicating and socializing, without the struggles and

challenges of communicating outside the Deaf community. Two of the participants expressed their association with both the Deaf and hearing cultures. Both communicate using a cochlear implant. They are able to speak with the assistance of the implant. In the Deaf culture, identities are created based on common factors such as race, ethnicity, education, religion, etc. However, communication skills also play a factor in creating Deaf identities. This is true in relation to a cochlear implant and the ability to speak. P7 explained that there is a divide between those who aspire to speak and those who protect their communication through sign language. There is a degree of discrimination for deaf individuals who go through speech therapy and learn how to speak. They are accused of not being proud to be deaf and wanting to assimilate to the hearing community. The argument made by deaf individuals who can speak is that they broaden the options available to them by bridging the communication gap between both worlds. Deaf individuals face many limitations because of the communication barrier.

Although learning to express verbally is an important function for integration, there is also discrimination in the hearing community when it comes to "deaf talking." Deaf talking is a term referencing the voice, sound, and pace of a deaf individual when using their voice. P7 spoke about many instances where he was made fun of because of the way he sounded. According to this participant, one of the biggest misconceptions about "deaf talking" is the connection between vocal delivery and intelligence, hence the label "deaf and dumb." He explained that for a deaf individual who is not confident about deafness and Deaf identities, society's negative attitudes towards "deaf talking" hinder their willingness to orally communicate with people outside the Deaf community. He also stated that because he can communicate with both the Deaf and hearing communities, he both associates and disassociates himself with the Deaf culture. He explained that his association is based on the experiences of the same difficulties and

limits that stem from not being able to hear. However, he did not consider himself culturally

Deaf, meaning he was not born deaf and sign language was not his first or only language. The

culture provides a sense of unity, commodity and familiarity. There is a unifying language, rules

of behavior and traditions. The understanding and connection to the same experiences,

challenges, and frustrations with society is the main reason why a deaf individual associates

themselves as being a part of the Deaf culture.

4.6   Education as Change Agent

People come to understand themselves, develop their sense of identities, participate in

their own socialization, and learn how to interact effectively with other members of society

(Blumer, 1969, 1972; Glenn, 2007; Mead, 1934 as cited in Lucas & Steimal, 2009). The

relationship between the Deaf community and the disabled community indicate that although

deafness is a disability, there is a separation between the two from the Deaf community's

standpoint. In relationship to disability, there are two different perspectives. On the one hand, the

relationship between the Deaf community and the disabled community depends on personal

choice and attitude. Each individual has their own thoughts about the topic. Deafness is the

invisible disability. When asked to expand on this idea of the invisible disability, P4 stated that

even after the passage of the ADA, there is still an ongoing fight for community access. Since

the ADA in 1990, there have been improvements in quality of inclusion as more places are

providing accommodations. Despite this, many places also refuse to make their business more

accessible. There is still limited opportunity to participate fully in society due to significant

barriers that arise from communication limitations. Many of the participants explained that there

is a barrier that is faced every day when going to public places, particularly when visiting a place

for the first time. However, the more a deaf person goes somewhere, the more likely

accommodations are to be in place, particularly at places of business and people who understand that person's experience. It takes time to develop relationships within the community. A key factor here is the strong sense of Deaf culture within different communities. For example, in South Dakota there is captioning in the theatres, a state school for the deaf as well as a four year college. In a Deaf friendly city, there are fewer language barriers. Those cities with larger deaf professionals have a strong Deaf community with strong values. P4 went on to explain that the quality of life in El Paso is worse for the Deaf community than in his current location in South Dakota. Due to the deaf school and the four year college in South Dakota, members of the Deaf community are likely to be educated, therefore creating a more accommodating city.

The lack of a deaf education system in El Paso is a major contributor to the success and productivity of deaf individuals in society. In the interview sessions, P7 explained that most deaf high school students graduate with a first to third grade reading level. He stated that this is credited to poor administration of the deaf education system and the problems associated with the teaching of two sign languages, SEE Sign and American Sign Language, in conjunction with English. As previously explained, SEE Sign is the signing of exact English. P7 provided a quick grammar lesson to expand on the challenges faced by deaf students, both conceptually and structurally. Take the word "butterfly" for example. In American Sign Language, one would sign an image of a butterfly, whereas in SEE Sign, one would sign the symbol for "butter," then the symbol for "fly." Conceptually, "butter" does not "fly" which leads to the confusion when learning English and understanding the meanings of words and their concepts. This participant went on to differentiate American Sign Language and English structurally. American Sign Language is much like the Spanish language. Its sentence structure is noun-adjective, while in English the sentence structure is adjective-noun. For example, to describe a house, a deaf

individual using American Sign Language would sign "house white." In English, we would say "white house." Due to the lack of proper education, many deaf individuals write and read how they sign, affecting their literacy level. In high school, many students communicate in both SEE Sign and American Sign Language. The mixture of sign languages with English causes confusion and conflicts, therefore inhibiting deaf success.

The last question in the interviews addressed social issues and how these issues affect a deaf individual's participation in society. The participants stated that they do not let the barriers keep them from living their lives in the community. However, they do face challenges that they work around in order to communicate, such as utilizing texting or writing. There is also a lot of self-advocacy that takes place on a daily basis, given that there is a lack of effort on society's part to be inclusive. For example, many have faced situations where they are trying to communicate and the person they are trying to communicate with becomes impatient and walks away. In relation to disability on the border, the idea of the ignored disability is most relevant. One interviewee explained how in Mexican culture, disability is taboo and something to be ashamed of. Therefore, people with disabilities, including individuals who are deaf, keep behind closed doors. It is then evident that the Deaf culture defines their disability status based on lack of accessibility as compared to the general disabled population. These practices lead to Deaf culture isolation by only attending Deaf events rather than other community events.

Existence can only be understood as an ongoing social process by individuals who are deaf and the collective society. It is through continual education that there is a better understanding of sign language and its role in creating Deaf culture. "Language plays an important role in the lives of all of us and is our most distinctive human possession. We might expect, therefore, to be well-informed about it; most of us have learned many things about

language from others, but generally wrong things" (Wardhaugh, 1999 as cited in Reagan, 2011). When asked the question of what each interviewee wanted society to know, the following responses were given: "learn and educate yourselves, deafness is increasing, especially in young children" (P7); "the problem is not the world, the problem is unawareness" (P4); and "there's many ways to communicate, interpretation, texting, email, writing on paper, etc. it's just a matter of education" (P2). From the responses of the interviewees, education is the first step in changing perceptions on the Deaf culture which can lead to actions to further include the Deaf community in mainstream society as well as preserve their cultural practices.

In summary, the research suggests four themes in response to the impact of language on the Deaf culture. First, language defines identities. Defining factors for an individual may include race, culture, religion, gender, etc. For the deaf individual, it is their language that defines who they are as individuals on a personal level and on a social level. The professional, relational, social, personal and economic areas of a deaf individual are affected and influenced by their language and the barriers and challenges that come along with it. The second theme is what I titled situational languages. This section refers to bilingualism and trilingualism within the Deaf community in El Paso. Multilingualism exists among deaf individuals on two levels. The first level is literal, which means the knowledge of two or more languages, such as ASL, English and Spanish. The second level of multilingualism is situational. This means the exposure of multiple languages based on the situation or location. The could mean that one form of sign language (ASL, home sign or SEE Sign) is used at school, while the other is used at home or in social settings. This also pertains to vocal languages. At school, a deaf individual is exposed to English, while at home the dominant language is Spanish. Such mixture of multiple languages can hinder the development and skills for a deaf individual particularly in terms of literacy.

49

Third, is the idea of hidden culture due to its limited exposure and the hidden barriers and challenges. This study sought to address the border culture of the deaf. In doing so, it is evident that the Deaf culture on the border is disadvantaged and is a hidden culture that most El Pasoans are unaware of. More diversity and mixture of language is apparent in a border culture in comparison to non-border cultures. And finally, education as a change agent, is a foundational theme. Here we see the importance of awareness, not only from the general society but from deaf individuals and the Deaf community.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

According to the results and analysis of participant's responses, the Deaf community in the El Paso borderland region create their identities and culture through the use of sign language. Based on this research project, it is evident that sign language plays a vital role in the creation of culture and identities. At the foundation of life and socialization is language for the Deaf community. It is through language that the self is created and it is through language that Deaf culture and society exist. Sign language influences decisions and their way of living. Although sign language does not completely restrict integration into the broader community, it does cause limitations due to language barriers. . Recognizing and working around those limitations is a matter of education. As previously mentioned, there is a degree of acceptance that takes place in regards to deafness and sign language. Language establishes and maintains relationships. "Language has fundamentally three roles in bonding a group of speakers to one another and to their culture…it is a symbol for social identity, a medium of social interaction and a store of cultural knowledge" (Lane, et al., 1996, p. 67). Advancement in employment and education is dependent on language and communication.

Language also determines cultural and social acceptance. Therefore, language defines identities and plays a vital role in the creation and establishment of the Deaf culture. This study was framed from symbolic interaction theory proposed by George Herbert Mead. The theory suggests that people interact through symbols; meanings evolve, therefore creating social structures and self concepts. Mead proposed that language is essential for the development of self identities . This directly relates to the Deaf culture and their individual and cultural identities through sign language.

Ethnic backgrounds, languages, and deafness also come together to create a unique Deaf culture on the border. Deafness on the border means a mixture of multiple languages and diverse ethnicities. Distinctions in race and color exist in other parts of the United States, whereas on the border, diversity overshadows those distinctions. There is exposure to different nationalities (i.e. Mexican), different languages, different cultures, and different traditions within the Deaf community. As one participant described, the Deaf community is a smaller scale of the larger community. The diversity that exists in the El Paso border region also exists in the Deaf culture on the border.

The Deaf community in El Paso is a small community compared to other regions in the United States. The majority of the participants interviewed have experienced different Deaf cultures in different locations. In explaining the differences between the Deaf culture in El Paso and other Deaf cultures, the main points are activity, accommodations and diversity. P2 lived in Dallas, Texas for a period of time. She explained that in Dallas, the Deaf culture is more active and visible. Because Dallas is a larger city than El Paso, there are more deaf events and deaf inclusion. Accommodations and ease of access contributes to the Deaf activity in Dallas. This woman also stated that the Deaf culture in El Paso is segregated. El Paso is not a Deaf friendly city as compared to Dallas. P4 explained that a major factor in the difference between the Deaf culture on the border and other Deaf cultures is education. He gave the Deaf culture in South Dakota as an example. In South Dakota, public places provide accommodations for the deaf. This is something that is not evident in El Paso, due to the greater challenges in education. In comparison to other cities and other deaf cultures, the Deaf community in El Paso faces tougher challenges in regards to education and accommodations. This is a result of exposure to multiple languages but little fluency in one particular language. For most participants, the language they

associate themselves with is not the language spoken at home. Conflict comes into play with literacy levels and communication skills. This is especially evident on the border. In regards to social interaction, the Deaf culture has an understanding and acceptance of difference. However, the Deaf culture is disadvantaged due to literacy levels and lack of quality of education. This argument is expanded when we discussed bilingualism and education.

Bilingualism does apply to the Deaf culture, both the culture generally speaking and more specifically the culture on the border. The larger Deaf community is bilingual by definition. Many members of the Deaf community in El Paso have knowledge of and implement both ASL and read and write in English. They conceptually utilize both languages; one to communicate orally and the other to communicate through writing. There is a great emphasis on multiple languages in this study in direct relation to border culture. While the typical deaf individual is taught ASL and English, the deaf individual on the border incorporates verbal Spanish and to the some extent Mexican Sign Language. Spanish is spoken in many of the households. Based on this research, a typical family consist of, in regards to language, a parent who speaks Spanish with little to no knowledge of ASL and the basics of home signing, siblings who speak English and may know the basics of ASL and the deaf child who signs in ASL, SEE Sign, or home sign and knows little or basic English, creating difficulties for Deaf individuals in communicating with their own family members.

The purpose of this study is to introduce the relationship between language and the deaf culture and a different concept of multilingualism to the field of communication. Because this is such a hidden culture, it is important to shed light on this topic. This research looks beyond linguistics, but emphasizes language in a cultural and communicative perspective. The incorporation of border culture in regards to deafness adds uniqueness of this study, especially

because this study focuses on the deaf culture in El Paso, Texas. Based on the research, it is evident that every aspect of life for a deaf individual is tied to language, particularly communication on all levels, in every area. My hopes for this research are to open the discussion of the Deaf community within the communication discipline. Communication studies are so broad and research conducted in this area has potential to benefit for Deaf and hearing communities. Deafness and Deaf culture are part of the society, therefore, worthy of emphasis and research.

This study is an introduction to sign language and Deaf culture from a border perspective. It lends itself to further the research in this area. Recommendations for further research would be to include a more diverse participation pool including more Deaf individuals from the Mexican American culture. There is a stigma of disabilities in a general sense in the Mexican culture, and more specifically a stigma of deafness. An expansion of deaf stigma in Mexico would be of importance to further research on Deaf culture on the border, as well as the differences between Mexican Sign Language and American Sign Language. This study touched on these recommendations; however, there can be more extensive research in these areas. This research established the fundamental role sign language has for the Deaf culture, which is a way of life for the Deaf community. It defines their culture and who they are as individuals. How an individual who is deaf experiences life is based on sign language as the means of communication. There are many aspects of sign language and how it is used to understand the world around. The purpose of this study is to build on the defining relationship between sign language and the Deaf culture from both a communicative perspective and a border differentiation perspective. How does the Deaf community in the El Paso Borderland region create identities and culture through the use of non-verbal communication? Based on the results in the study, we find that sign language is the

culture. It is an animated form of communication that defines the culture and it is the distinguishing characteristic that separates the Deaf and disabilities culture.

This study adds to the body of literature surrounding sign language and the Deaf culture. First, there is little research done on this topic in the area of communication studies. This is evident in the literature review of the study. The current study focused on what Deaf individuals say about communication phenomenon and sign language, how they explain and talk about their culture and the language they use, and what are the messages they rely on. Second, the most significant aspect of the study is that there is limited literature from a border perspective on sign language and Deaf culture. What this study brings insight to is the fact that sign language varies from region to region and much more from culture to culture. Therefore it can be concluded that the variations in sign language, most evident on the border, creates a diversified Deaf culture.

Research on disabilities tends to focus on the medical and physical conditions of the individual. The problem is that there is more to a human life then our physical and medical conditions. Cultural and social influences shed light to the understanding of people and I believe that understanding leads to inclusion and integration. A study like this opens our minds and brings awareness to social issues. They go beyond the question of how people with different abilities experience life. They serve as influential tools to bring about change. The disabled and Deaf communities are only groups that anyone can join at any time: at birth or through an accident, illness, or the aging process. This is a reality that encourages people like me to find disabilities worthy of study from all perspectives, across all disciplines.

References

Anderson G. B., & Miller, K. R. (2005). Appreciating diversity through stories about the lives of deaf people of color. *American Annals of the Deaf,* 149, 375-383.

Anderson, G.B., & Miller, K.R. (2004). In their own words: Researching stories about the lives of deaf people of color. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 6(2), 28-33.

Andrews, J. F., & Dionne, V. (2011). "Down the language rabbit hole with Alice": A case study of a deaf girl with a cochlear implant. *International Journal of Otolaryngology*, 2011, 1-8.

Andrews, J. F., & Rusher, M. (2010). Codeswitching techniques: Evidence-based instructional practices for the ASL/English bilingual classroom. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 155(4), 407-424.

Armstrong, K. L. (n.d.). Self, situations, and sport consumption: An exploratory study of symbolic interactionism. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 30 (2), 111-129.

Avon, A. (2006). Watching films, learning language, experiencing culture: An account of deaf culture through history and popular films. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 39(2), 185-204.

Azmuddin, R.A., & Ibrahim, D. Z. (2011). The contribution of language to the construction of self identity among young Turkish-Australian females. *Universi Tun Abdul Razak E-Journal*, 7, 27-38.

Bishop, M., & Hicks, S. (2005). Orange eyes: Bimodel bilingualism in hearing adults from deaf families. *Sign Language Studies*, 5(2), 188-230.

Breivik, J. (2005). Vulnerable but strong: Deaf people challenge established understandings of deafness. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 33, 18-23.

Burbank, P.M., & Martins, D.C. (2009). Symbolic interactionsim and critical perspective:

Divergent of synergistic? *Nursing Philosophy*, 11, 25-41.

Burch, S. (2000). In a different voice: Sign language preservation and America's deaf

community. *Bilingual Research Journal: The Journal of the National Association for

Bilingual Education*, 24(4), 443-464.

Chatham-Carpenter, A. (2006). Internal self esteem: God as symbolic interactionism's

"significant other"? *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 19, 103-126.

Chatterjee, R. (2010). Information and communication for persons with disabilities. *Global

Media Journal*, Winter Issue, 1-10.

Damian, S. (2011). Spoken vs. sign language: What's the difference? *Cognition, Brain,

Behavior. An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 15 (2), 251-265.

Esmail, J. (2008). The power of deaf poetry: The exhibition of literacy and the nineteenth-

century sign language debates. *Sign Language Studies*, 8 (4), 348-368.

Fletcher-Carter, R. (1997). Exploring the personal culture of rural deaf/hard of hearing students.

Rural Special Education Quarterly, 16 (2), 18-29.

Fletcher-Carter, R., & Paez, D. (2010). Exploring the personal cultures of rural deaf/hard of

hearing students. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 29 (2), 18-24.

Golos, D. B. (2010). The representation of deaf characters in children's educational television in

the US. *Journal of Children and Medial*, 4(3), 248-260.

Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and reality.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Grosjean. F. (2008). *Studying bilinguals*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Printing Press.

Halfon, N., Houtrow, A., Larson, K., & Newacheck, P. W. (2012). The changing landscape of

disability in childhood. *The Future of Children*, 22(1), 13-42.

Haller, B., Dorries, B., & Rahn, J. (2006). Media labeling versus the US disability community

      identity: A study of shifting cultural language. *Disability & Society*, 21 (1). 61-75.

Hole, R. (2007). Narratives of identity: A poststructural analysis of three Deaf women's life

      stories. *Narrative Inquiry*, 17, 259-278.

Hott, L.R. (2007). Creating the history through deaf eyes documentary. *Sign Language Studies*,

      7(2), 135-140.

Jamieson, K. (1977). Symbolic interactionism as an approach to the study of human

      communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 63, 84-91.

Kallman, D. I. (2012). *Life without boundaries: A positive deviance inquiry of communication*

      behaviors that influence academic success of learning-disabled university students.

      (Master's thesis). University of Texas at El Paso: El Paso, TX.

Kyle, J.G., & Pullen, G. (1988). Cultures in contact: Deaf and hearing people. *Disabiltiy,*

      Handicap & Society, 3(1), 49-61.

Lane, H., Hoffmeister, R., & Bahan, B. (1996). *A journey into the DEAF-WORLD*. San Diego,

      CA: DAWNSIGNPRESS.

Licqurish, S. & Seibold, C. (2011). Applying a contemporary grounded theory methodology.

      Nurse Researcher, 18 (4), 11-16.

Lindemann, K. & Cherney, J. L. (2008). Communicating in and through "Murderball":

      Masculinity and disability in wheelchair rugby. *Western Journal of Communication*, 72

      (2), 107-125.

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B.C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods.* 3rd ed.

      Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Lucas, K. & Steimal, S. J. (2009). Creating and responding to the gen(d)eralized other: Women

    miners' community constructed identities. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 32 (3),

    320-347.

Luckner, J.L. & Muir, S. (2002). Suggestions for helping students who are deaf succeed in

    general education settings. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 24 (1), 23-30.

Manning, P., & Smith, G. (2010). Symbolic interactionism. In A. Elliott (Ed.), *The routledge*

    companion to social theory (p. 37-55). New York, NY: Routlege.

Mead, G. H. (1967). The self and the organism. In C.W. Morris (Ed.), *Mind, self, & society from*

    the stand point of a social behaviorist (p. 135-144). Chicago, IL: The University of

    Chicago Press.

Mead, G. H. (1967). Play, the game, and the generalized other. In C.W. Morris (Ed.), *Mind, self,*

    & society from the stand point of a social behaviorist (p. 152-164). Chicago, IL: The

    University of Chicago Press.

Mead, G. H. (1967). The basis of human society: Man and the insects. In C.W. Morris (Ed.),

    Mind, self, & society from the stand point of a social behaviorist (p. 227-238). Chicago,

    IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Mead, G. H. (1967). The social foundations and functions of thought and communication. In

    C.W. Morris (Ed.), *Mind, self, & society from the stand point of a social behaviorist* (p.

    253-260). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Moser, I. (2006). Disability and the promises of technology: Technology, subjectivity and

    embodiment within an order of the normal. *Information, Communication & Society*, 9(3),

    373-395.

Najarian, C.G. (2008). Deaf women: Educational experiences and self- identity. *Disability &*

Society, 23, 117-128.

Pelka, F. (1996). Bashing the disabled: The right-wing attack on the ADA. *The Humanist*, 26-30.

Reagan, T. (2011). Ideological barriers to American Sign Language: Unpacking linguistic

resistance. *Sign Language Studies*, 11 (4), 606-636.

Rosen, R. S. (2003). Jargons for deafness as institutional constructions of the deaf body.

Disability & Society, 18(7), 921-934.

Senghas, R.J., & Monaghan, L. (2002). Signs of their times: Deaf communities and the culture of

language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31, 69-97.

Shultz, K. & Germeroth, D. (1998). Should we laugh or should we cry? John Callahan's humor

as a tool to change societal attitudes toward disability. *The Howard Journal of

Communications*, 9,   229-244.

Skelton, T., & Valentine, G. (2003). It feels like being Deaf is normal: An exploration into the

complexities of defining D/deafness and young D/deaf people's identities. *The Canadian

Geographer*, 47, 451-466.

Sklair, C., & Muller Quadros, R. (2004). Bilingual deaf education in the South of Brazil.

International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 7(5), 368-380.

Sutton-Spence, R. (2010). The role of sign language narratives in developing identity for Deaf

children. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 47, 265-305.

Soffer, M., Rimmerman, A., Blanck, P., & Hill, E. (2010). Media and the Israeli disability rights

legislation: Progress or mixed and contradictory images. *Disability & Society*, 25 (6).

687-699.

Wilkinson, P., & McGill, P. (2008). Representation of people with intellectual disabilities in a

British newspaper in 1983-2001. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*,

22. 65- 76.

Young, A.M. (1999). Hearing parents' adjustment to a deaf child: The impact of a cultural-

lingustic model of deafness. *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic*

Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community, 13(2), 157-176.

Appendix A
Informed Consent

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: Deaf Culture: The Creation of Self and Socialization Through the Use of Sign Language

Principal Investigator: Marisela Garcia

UTEP: Communication

You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. Please take your time making a decision and feel free to discuss it with your friends and family. Before agreeing to take part in this research study, it is important that you read the consent form that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

2. Why is this study being done?

You have been asked to take part in a research study of Deaf Culture: The creation of self and socialization through the use of sign language. This study seeks to bring insight to how sign language plays a role in border Deaf culture and to define the relationship between the Deaf community and the disabilities community.

Approximately 5 to 10 participants will be enrolling in this study. You are being asked to be in the study because you are a Deaf individual who is active in the Deaf community. If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will last about an hour for an interview. Locations of interviews will vary with each participant.

3. What is involved in the study?

If you agree to take part in this study, I will ask you questions in regards to the Deaf culture.

4. What are the risks and discomforts of the study?

There are no known risks associated with this research

5. What will happen if I am injured in this study?

The University of Texas at El Paso and its affiliates do not offer to pay for or cover the cost of medical treatment for research related illness or injury. No funds have been set aside to pay or reimburse you in the event of such injury or illness. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form. You should report any such injury to Marisela Garcia, mgarcia23@miners.utep.edu,
(915) 526-4341 and to the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-8841) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

6. Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

There will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. However, this research may help us to understand the Deaf community as well as educate us on the relationship with the disabilities community.

7. What other options are there?

You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

8. Who is paying for this study?

No is no funding for this study.

9. What are my costs?

There are no direct costs. You will be responsible for travel to and from the research site and any other incidental expenses.

10. Will i be paid to participate in this study?

You will not be paid for taking part in this research study.

11. What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to a member of the research group so that they know why you are leaving the study. If there are any new

findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them. The researcher may decide to stop your participation without your permission, if he or she thinks that being in the study may cause you harm.

12. Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call Marisela Garcia at (915) 526-4341, mgarcia23@miners.utep.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-8841) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

13. What about confidentiality?

Your part in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name without your permission. All material and recordings will be kept in a secure location, only accessible by Marisela Garcia.

15. Authorization Statement

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I will get a copy of this consent form now and can get information on results of the study later if I wish.

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Time: _____

Consent form explained/witnessed by:

_____

Signature

Printed name: _____

Date: _____   Time: _____

Appendix B
Interview Questions

1. Sex
     Male   Female

2. Age
     0-17   18-24   25-60   61 and over

3. Race
     White   Black/African American   Hispanic   Other_____

4. Native Country
     US   Other_____

5. How many languages do you speak?

6. What language (s) do you consider your native language (s)?

7. What languages (s) are spoken at home?

8. Where did you learn sign language?

9. It's been said that a Deaf individual is considered to be bilingual. What do you think?

10. Which do you identify with more, American Sign Language (ASL) or Mexican Sign Language (MSL)? Why?

11. Do you identify yourself as being a part of the Deaf culture? Why or why not?

12. What role does language have in creating your identity as a deaf person?

13. How would you describe the Deaf culture?

14. What are some of the cultural traditions of the Deaf community? What are some of the cultural values?

15. What ethnic group do you associate yourself with?

16. How would you describe the Deaf culture on the border? How does it differ from non-bordering communities?

17. How does the deaf view the language barrier towards the ability to participate in mainstream society (going to the movies, clubs, school, the doctor or emergency room, fast food drive through windows, etc.)? How does it impact the ability to function in society and perceived quality of life?

Vita

Marisela Garcia was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. She is the daughter of Thomas Richard Garcia and Maria Elena Garcia. She is a first generation college graduate. Marisela graduated with honors from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) with a Bachelor of Arts in Organizational and Corporate Communication, and a minor in Management. Throughout her undergraduate studies, she maintained high academic standing, landing her on the Liberal Arts Dean's list every semester for four years. While pursuing her education at UTEP, Marisela has worked for the past seven years at Volar Center for Independent Living (CIL), a non-profit organization that works with people with disabilities. During her senior year as an undergraduate student, in addition to her position at Volar CIL, she took a paid internship at the El Paso International Airport with the Public Relations department. In the years spent working at Volar CIL, Marisela worked as an assistant and was later promoted to a full-time position as Community Relations Coordinator.

Marisela prides herself in the ability to successfully maintain high achievements both academically and professionally. It was from her experience and passion that she gained from working with people with disabilities that encouraged her to pursue her master's with a concentration on disability related issues. During her time as a graduate student at UTEP, Marisela was offered a Teaching Assistant position with the Communication Department, which led her to the opportunity to become a graduate instructor for Public Speaking courses. Due to her hard work, dedication and perseverance, it is with great honor that Marisela was awarded Outstanding Graduate Student for the Communication Department.

Permanent address: 3150 N. Yarbrough E-13

                       El Paso, TX. 79925

This thesis was typed by Marisela Garcia.