

**Hawaii International Conference on Education Jan 7-10, 2003 (Proceedings Submission)**

Deaf Culture and Ethnic Minorities: What's Technology Got to Do With It?

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**Title of the submission:** Deaf Culture and Ethnic Minorities: What's Technology Got to Do With It?

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**Abstract:** The deaf and hard of hearing population, like many other groups of persons with disabilities has suffered oppression, segregation and isolation. Unique to the deaf and hard of hearing population however is a movement to establish a recognized deaf culture as a sociological minority culture based primarily on American Sign Language (ASL). This movement gained momentum at Gallaudet University in the 1980's and has been an issue of debate since that time. Most recently this debate has been fueled further with the advent of the cochlear implant. The implant will allow many persons with hearing loss to function as hearing persons and therefore, some believe, threaten the concept of "deaf culture." This is because the cochlear implant allows many persons with hearing loss to participate more fully in hearing culture, and thus relay less on the foundation of "deaf culture," American Sign Language (ASL). Another issue related to the culture idea among deaf persons is the argument that deaf culture is not a homogeneous group and is composed of many different cultural groups. These arguments about self-definition have obvious implications for discussion of the concept of self-determination as it relates to the question of self-concept among deaf persons and the deaf culture movement.

Although prior research has explored the concept of deaf culture, and self-concept among persons with hearing loss, differences between the views of Anglo-American deaf and hard of hearing persons and culturally and linguistically diverse minority deaf and hard of hearing persons with respect to their identification with deaf culture has not been adequately explored. Therefore, the objective of this research is to explore the concept of deaf culture and self-determination among culturally and linguistically diverse minority deaf and hard of hearing persons, and to explore differences and similarities between this population and the deaf and hard of hearing Anglo population. Additionally, this research will explore questions related to the impact of technology (i.e., cochlear implant) on persons in the deaf and hard of hearing community, as well as the impact of technology on their perception of "deaf culture." Affective behaviors, attitudes, feelings, knowledge, perceptions, etc., of deaf and hard of hearing persons and their families will be explored as they relate to these concepts. Questions relating to the "technological divide" among the deaf and hard of hearing will be explored as they relate to academic, vocational, and social success of Anglo deaf and hard of hearing as compared to culturally and linguistically diverse minority deaf and hard of hearing persons. The major research questions are:

- 1) What do culturally and linguistically diverse minority deaf and hard of hearing persons think about the new technologies (i.e. the cochlear implant, hearing aids, assistive technology devices, etc.)?
- 2) Are there differences in what culturally and linguistically diverse minority deaf and hard of hearing persons think and what non-culturally and linguistically diverse minority deaf and hard of hearing persons think about the "new technologies?"
- 3) Are culturally and linguistically diverse minority deaf and hard of hearing persons and their families being influenced by "deaf culture" advocates who might represent their deaf interests, but maybe not their racial or ethnic interests?

This is exploratory research that hypothesizes that individuals who are deaf or severely hard of hearing and who identify themselves relative to the "deaf culture", have a sense of self-determination that is the same as hearing individuals who identify with the broader hearing culture. Furthermore, self determined individuals will more likely be those who embrace the use of technology (i.e. the use of the Internet, the use of cochlear implants where appropriate, and the use of other technological advances). Data will be collected using focus groups, personal interviews, questionnaires, and surveys. Analysis will be done using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The ultimate goal of the research is to create a conceptual model for deaf and hard of hearing individuals that can be applied across racial and ethnic lines. This model should also acknowledge an individual's self-recognized strengths relative to their "cultural" identification and their knowledge and use of technology which in turn, builds self-determination skills.