

Deaf Gay or Gay Deaf: Interpreter Awareness of the Identity, Culture and Language of the Deaf Gay Male Community

Deafness and gayness are often likened to be similar. Firstly, most deaf people have hearing parents as most gay people have straight parents. Secondly, deaf people and gay people are labeled as *different* to the majority population; one group because of their perceived disability and the other because of their sexual orientation. So, imagine when a Deaf man identifies as gay. They will most likely have straight hearing parents, be discriminated upon based on their loss of hearing and sexuality and potentially be encouraged to try to change their natural ways, to placate the masses.

My current Masters Degree research is focused on the identity, culture and language of the Deaf gay male community. Because of the high instance of deaf children being born to hearing parents, deaf identity and culture is often difficult to form and commonly developed later in life with peer support. This is similar to the formation of a gay identity and culture but this can sometimes conflict with some of the Deaf cultural norms often expected. Deaf gay men have reported to me that they will also potentially experience disability discrimination and instances of homophobia, which is paralleled to those within the Deaf black community who face racism and homophobia (Brown III, Clarence Ezra, 2008)

The World Federation of the Deaf assert that one of their most important priorities is 'to ensure human rights for deaf people all over the world, in every aspect of life' but fail to explicitly mention sexuality in the list of various aspects it offers. I believe that in the research I have conducted with British Deaf gay men, I have started to gather their views on how the interactions they have within the deaf and gay communities that they find themselves engaging in, affect their life in general. I have also asked them about the 'Deaf gay community'; is there such a thing and what does it mean to them?

As a result and by sharing the findings of my research with sign language interpreters world-wide, interpreters and people working with the deaf gay community, will be better equipped to understand the essential information required when working with this community. Armed with this knowledge, interpreters will be better equipped to interact and work with members of the Deaf gay community, ensuring respect and appreciation for the community as an entity.

References:

Brown III, Clarence Ezra (2008). Racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community: negotiating gay black male experience. Master's Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.