

### ***13. Dysconscious Audism: A Theoretical Proposition***

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#### **Dysconscious Racism and Dysconscious Audism**

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IN JOYCE KING'S WORK on dysconscious racism, she shares her interpretation of how her university students perceived the meaning of racial inequity. She claims that her students exhibited uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequity: they did not think of the underlying causes of racism and, more importantly, possible solutions to racism. To think critically is to explore, analyze, and evaluate thoroughly the conditions caused by racism. Why did a certain situation happen and how can it be improved or modified? Instead, her students accepted and perpetuated "certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths and beliefs." King discovered that students had "impaired consciousness" of what racism means due to their limited understanding and experience.<sup>1</sup>

King then defines dysconscious racism as a form of racism that implicitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges. She emphasizes that it is not the absence of consciousness but rather impaired consciousness that engendered this term. When challenged to think critically, we must question the ideology of racial inequity and be able to identify and criticize it objectively. The students did not recognize that structural inequity is linked to racial inequity as a form of exploitation. King's students were aware of the racial issues, racial inequity, and racial prejudice. However, they lacked the depth of ethical judgment connected to formulating some rationale for inequity. King realized that their thinking was impaired when analyzing racial ideology. King builds a framework for us to recognize dysconscious racism where an analysis can be developed of how clearly people understand the consciousness of minority groups.

Some Deaf people do experience an impaired consciousness the same way students experienced it in King's study. Some Deaf people, though they resist being assimilated into the dominant culture, still incorporate some antithetical values from the dominant culture. In this manner, these Deaf individuals experience an impaired consciousness: a phenomenon for which I coined the term "dysconscious audism." This is a new concept and I have created this phrase based on Joyce King's work on dysconscious racism.

With the term "dysconscious audism," I describe a phenomenon that is defined as a form of audism that tacitly accepts dominant hearing norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about Deaf consciousness. "Dysconscious audism" adheres to the ideology that hearing society, because it is dominant, is more appropriate than the Deaf society. Such Deaf people can be characterized as not having fully developed Deaf conscious-

ness connected to the Deaf identity, and they may still feel the need to assimilate into the mainstream culture.

### **Dr. Rachel Stone and California School for the Deaf, Riverside: Audism and Dysconscious Audism**

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In the year 2000, California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR) selected Dr. Rachel Stone as the superintendent.<sup>2</sup> She became the first Deaf and female to head the school. Less than two years after the appointment, Dr. Stone was dismissed, likely for her strong views of Deaf bilingualism and biculturalism on educating Deaf students. She also emphasized the importance of bilingualism for the students—with equal importance placed on both English and American Sign Language (ASL). Her priority was student success, as she saw no reason that the deaf could not receive quality education. Dr. Stone believed that effective pedagogical approaches specifically appropriate for Deaf students would make all the difference in their academic success, which up to this point had not been progressing sufficiently. Dr. Stone's desire for an effective bilingual-bicultural environment was simply oppressed by administrators, teachers, and parents who espoused traditional hearingcentric education for the CSDR students and wanted to see that system remain status quo. Quite a few Deaf staff along with some hearing individuals did take a position in support of Dr. Stone and fought valiantly on her behalf. However, a sizable number of Deaf teachers, administrators, and parents who supported her philosophical stance stood helplessly in the ouster of Dr. Stone as CSDR Superintendent.<sup>3</sup>

The unwillingness to accept Dr. Stone's leadership and vision for a Deaf bilingualism and bicultural education at CSDR reveals the hidden power of oppression; namely, audism. It has a strong bearing on the hearing supremacy in educating deaf learners, even in a Deaf school setting like CSDR. While the term audism is not yet inserted in dictionaries, an in-depth treatise on audism can be obtained by reading Dirksen Bauman's article "Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression."<sup>4</sup> His article will strive to further define the term as well. Some CSDR members were clearly audists in their overthrow of Dr. Stone. As for those Deaf administrators, teachers, and parents who took no action to aid Dr. Stone, even though they supported her goals for CSDR, why did they do nothing for her? The term dysconscious audism might provide some explanation for their lack of action in taking a strong stand for her and indirectly for themselves. This article will both introduce the concept of dysconscious audism, as well as present a theoretical proposition of it. Further examples will best illustrate the important features of dysconscious audism and its strong connection to audism.

### **Deaf Education Agenda Controlled by Hearing Educators**

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Now more than ever, I see so many issues at hand, especially with the larger society due to its lack of understanding about Deaf language, heritage, and culture. The true benefits of education escape most Deaf individuals because a large majority of hearing educators controls the "deaf education" agenda, which is laden with misconceptions.

To make matters worse, even as more effective means of educating Deaf individuals are demonstrated, Deaf language and culture are still not receiving widespread acceptance in the classroom.<sup>5</sup>

Hearing educators' main focus is on the stigma that Deaf individuals need to be "fixed" to correct their hearing and speaking deficiencies. More often than not, this further perpetuates society's larger view of Deaf people as inferior and subhuman and who need to be "rehabilitated" into being like hearing individuals for the sole purpose of assimilating them into mainstream American society.<sup>6</sup>

Basically, this is a classic example of ethnocentrism. However, it does not mean that hearing educators who are comfortable subscribing to Deaf bilingualism/biculturalism cannot be our allies. At present, the system of educating deaf individuals is failing to meet their educational and societal needs. There is a very common pattern among Deaf individuals who are kept away from effective visual language and a rich cultural heritage. As a result, many of them proceed through school life without a sense of direction. To properly educate and motivate Deaf individuals in life, we must see that, first and foremost, they are treated as human beings and are empowered with a natural language and rich cultural heritage.

Let's look at the story of Dr. Stone's ouster at CSDR once again. Were CSDR Deaf people's perceptions of their experience shifting away from Deaf empowerment toward the hearing dominant majority? They might have unwittingly accepted the changing values in the Deaf community to "please" the hearing world. Do Deaf people, generally speaking, experience the loss of their Deaf empowerment? Is the loss of their Deaf center creating Deaf individuals who view the Deaf world differently? Without Deaf empowerment, the Deaf consciousness is affected, becomes chaotic, and brings nothing to the world from Deaf people but a strange version of hearing people. The voice from Deaf-empowered individuals is critical to creating a just society of Deaf people.

## Deaf Consciousness toward Audism

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In order to explore the impact of audism on the lives of Deaf individuals, I conducted an ethnographic study that included eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents who were selected for the study to validate the existence of oppression on Deaf people.<sup>7</sup> They shared their experiences as members of the Deaf community. They have had Deaf Culture, American Sign Language, and other features that made being Deaf a positive experience. At the same time, they faced the negative experiences of oppression. Oppression has continually and, in most cases, surreptitiously been interwoven into the lives of Deaf people, including their own life encounters that are layered with audism.

The oppression of Deaf people appears to be omnipresent and everlasting. Some of the eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents experienced firsthand the prohibition of the use of sign language because they were told that sign language would ruin their chance for succeeding in American society. Some witnessed hearing people's devaluation of Deaf people's attempts to build up their Deaf identity. Some valued a strong Deaf identity to counteract their indoctrination about the superiority of hearing people's language, identity, education, and community/culture. They expressed the awareness of hearing

people who tried to recast Deaf people into the image of hearing people, but as lesser citizens in the hearing world. Some of them noted that hearing educators reported the deficiencies of Deaf learners in order to justify and validate themselves as worthy individuals or as acknowledged experts on the education of so-called helpless Deaf individuals. As a consequence, the hearing populace supported the hearing educators' plan of action in educating deaf children. Some saw that hearing people discredited Deaf people's yearning for their own community and culture. Even the history of Deaf community/culture had no meaning to such hearing people. All they wanted to do was erase Deaf Culture and history. In the name of their expertise on deafness, these hearing people felt obligated to eliminate deafness, by any means, as well as Deaf people whom they thought brought an embarrassment to the society.<sup>8</sup>

Below are the examples of situations as described by each to illustrate the different forms of oppression that are structural rather than individual, often happening in relationships between hearing and Deaf groups. Alan commented about the oralists from the Alexander Graham Bell Organization who tried to put a stop to sign language being promoted in public through an NBC television show. Bonnie encountered a hearing woman working at a school for the deaf who could not sign at all. The school for the deaf was ready to dismiss Bonnie because she took a position challenging to the nonsigning woman. Carl related the frustrations of his father, who was a top-notch printer but never received a bonus for his excellence at work while his hearing counterparts who showed less commitment to work received the bonuses. When Felicia was a young girl, she saw her deaf classmates beaming with pride for being rewarded for good speech while she was slapped by her teachers for signing. As an adult, Felicia looked back to that scene and cringed at the overemphasis on speech and underemphasis on real education. Edward reported that there were no history books on Deaf people when he was growing up. Debbie made a choice to attend a regular university with the provision of support services to Deaf students. At one time, she wanted to drop out of the university due to her frustration over dealing with incompetent interpreters who made her feel more isolated from her professors and fellow classmates by interfering with direct communication. As a native signer of ASL, Glenn found SimCom (an abbreviated term of Simultaneous Communication, which refers to the simultaneous use of signing and speaking) to be an obstacle to him in terms of undermining his comprehension of what was being said. Yet SimCom continued on no matter how many Deaf individuals held it to be an abomination. Helen mentioned a hearing-oriented media report that glowed with praise for former Miss America Heather Whitestone's decision to get a cochlear implant. In that case, Helen argued, the media had no clue as to why the Deaf world did not applaud Whitestone in the way the hearing world did.

The thoughts and feelings as expressed by the eight Deaf persons in the above paragraph necessitate the attention to the term audism. These stories confirmed the existence of a deep-layered shroud of audism. Because of the prevalence of audist practices, both conscious and unconscious, Deaf people are oppressed in many ways. See Figure 13.1 for effects of audism on Deaf individuals. Presently, there is still a sizable group of Deaf people who would be categorized as "dysconscious audists" because they haven't developed their own Deaf consciousness and identity to the fullest. Generally

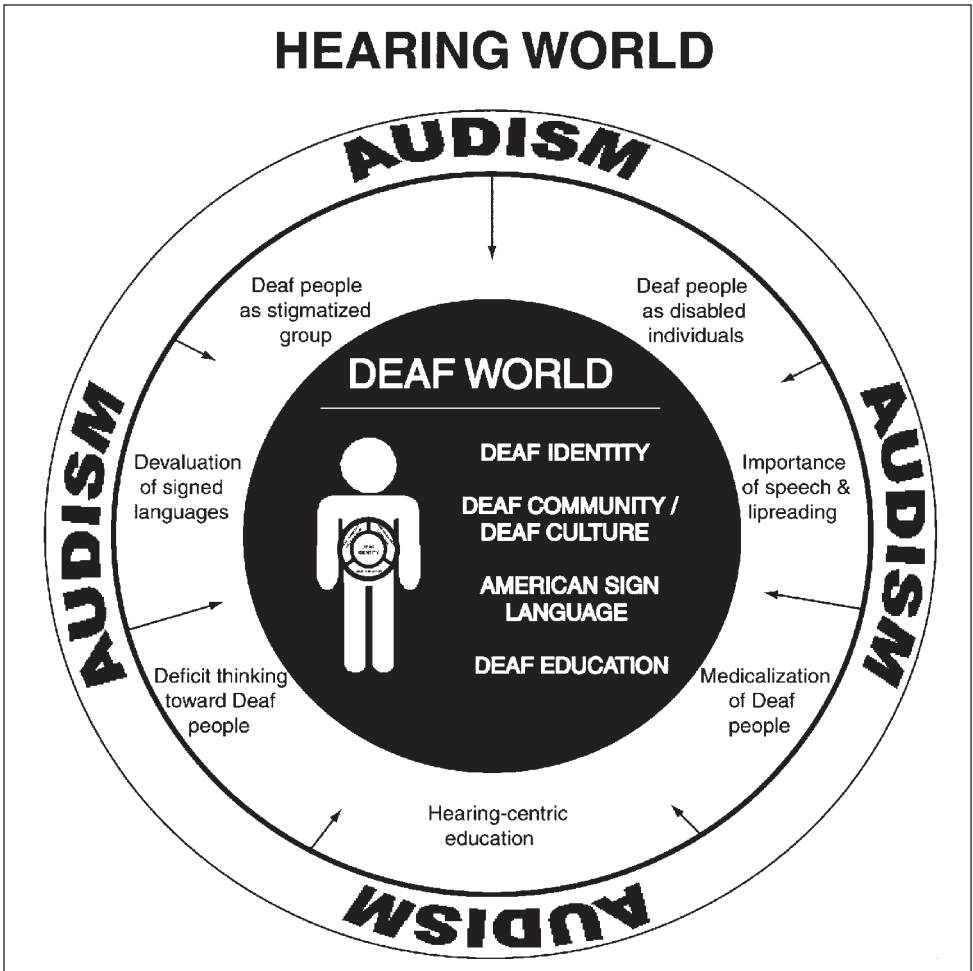


Figure 13.1. Effects of audism on the Deaf individual.

their Deaf consciousness is distorted to varying degrees. Dysconscious audistic Deaf people unwittingly help to continue the kind of victimized thinking that they are responsible for their failure. Such thinking enables hearing people to continue pathologizing Deaf people.

The marked difference between “unconscious” and “dysconscious” when used with the word audism is that the word unconscious implies that the person is completely unaware whereas the word dysconscious implies that the person does have an inkling of his or her consciousness but does not yet realize it is impaired. Some Deaf individuals choose to do nothing about it or to take a “so be it” attitude. In this manner, it is not that they are completely unaware of the issues; it’s just their decision on how to live with them.

With the “dysconscious audism” framework in mind, the weakening of Deaf identity associates with the lack of Deaf consciousness within the present context and the impact of hegemonic forces. Hearing people’s obsession over the cure of deafness contributes significantly to the weakening of Deaf people’s identity. When the Deaf person’s

identity is distorted, they cannot fully understand their own behavior. A large number of Deaf individuals are not even aware that they possess, to varying degrees, these kinds of audistic behaviors and attitudes. The critical features of dysconscious audism are the following:

- Dysconscious audism disempowers Deaf people from becoming liberated.
- Dysconscious audism disables Deaf people from expressing Deaf cultural pride.
- Dysconscious audism intimidates Deaf people and limits their promotion of the Deaf perspective.
- Dysconscious audism hinders Deaf people from attaining quality education.
- Dysconscious audism denies Deaf people full acceptance of ASL.
- Dysconscious audism weakens Deaf people in the development of their Deaf identity.

### **Responses to Two Selected Topics by the Eight Deaf Adults of Deaf Parents in Quest of Understanding Dysconscious Audism**

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The eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents had been raised in the Deaf world since birth and, in the early years of their lives, knew the other side of the world known as the hearing world. They had been told stories about hearing people during their formative years by their Deaf parents. They had made their own personal observations of hearing people from some distance, and they had had real-life interactions with hearing people. These all influenced the impressions, attitudes, judgments, beliefs, etc. that they had about hearing people and the hearing world.

This section focuses on Deaf adults of Deaf parents and their slices of reactions to two topics that affect the Deaf community. The educational experiences and socialization they had in school added an important dimension to their present outlook at today's Deaf world. While they are all Deaf individuals with an affiliation to the Deaf world and the fluency of American Sign Language, each one represented is unique. Moreover, no two Deaf families are alike. These individuals covered a span of the three generations of Deaf individuals in which their life histories illustrated the changes in America in its societal treatment of Deaf people over fifty years. Most of them were either second- or third-generation Deaf individuals. Only one of them was a fourth-generation Deaf individual. Almost all of them attended residential schools for the deaf. Their philosophical stances and views on deafness, language, and culture were not identical, yet they offered many similarities. Their sharing of their views has contributed vital information to the reader about what the lives of Deaf people coming from Deaf parents might look like. Figure 13.2 provides the backgrounds of the eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents in five areas: age, Deaf generation, school attended, undergraduate college attended, and whether or not the parents were college educated.

#### **SIMULTANEOUS COMMUNICATION**

A limited number of people are particularly skilled at talking and signing at the same time, but many other people are really not able to do it. They try to talk and sign at

<i>Informant</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Deaf generation</i>	<i>School attended</i>	<i>Undergraduate college attended</i>	<i>College-educated parents</i>
Alan	early 70s	second	deaf school	Gallaudet University	no
Bonnie	late 40s	third	deaf school	Gallaudet University	no
Carl	mid-50s	third	deaf school	Gallaudet University	no
Debbie	early 40s	second	deaf school	hearing university	no
Edward	early 40s	second	deaf school	Gallaudet University	no
Felicia	early 40s	third	deaf school	Gallaudet University	no
Glenn	early 30s	second	deaf school	Gallaudet University	no
Helen	late 20s	fourth	hearing school	Gallaudet University	yes

Figure 13.2. Backgrounds of informants.

the same time and nothing clear comes out. As a result of using SimCom, many signs are dropped out. The sign also deteriorates significantly in its quality and intelligibility. Often, many Deaf people can't understand what people are saying, and they have to work so much harder to try and receive the message. When people speak English, the ASL becomes unintelligible. SimCom is an incomprehensible mix of two different modalities.<sup>9</sup> "I would rather see somebody explaining or speaking their piece by using American Sign Language or English," Felicia said, to emphasize that point. "They don't mix well." She could tell the difference when one used SimCom.

I can tell if somebody is using their voice at the same time with signs, and once a hearing person, or even a Deaf person for that matter, starts to use speech, I will bust them right on the spot: "Are you talking while you're signing?"

"If it's clear enough, that's fine," Alan said. He accepted SimCom. If it becomes very muddled, and a lot of signs get dropped, then he is not in support of it. He has written a book on the topic of communication and an article on talking and signing at the same time. "If I had a choice [to communicate with] a person who was fluent in talking and signing simultaneously and somebody who was fluent just in sign," Alan said, "I would choose the person fluent in sign."

"For certain purposes and functions, I think SimCom is fine," Bonnie said. She accepted the use of SimCom. "It goes back again to the importance of open communication." Why must one say, "You can't do that," if it can work out satisfactorily? In this particular situation, should communication be forfeited because we are not allowed to use a resource that could possibly help us communicate? In her mind, restrictions of this type are not justified. "Why not, whatever helps."

What results often in SimCom is the utterances come out in English word order. It's due to the fact that the person is not able to speak English words using ASL syntax. "It just doesn't make sense to me when the speech skews the message in ASL," Glenn said succinctly.

Helen explained her "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" communication split:



I do admit that when I sign, I mouth. Sometimes I mouth the shapes of words and sometimes I don't. What's odd is that when I'm at my workplace, I will definitely sign and mouth simultaneously. At home, I use full ASL and do not mouth any words.

It is reasonable to suspect that the settings influence the language that she uses. "If I'm in a restaurant or bar, I use ASL but still may switch to SimCom. It depends on who's present and my desire to make myself clear." She didn't want any misunderstandings to occur. Helen does not support using speech and signing at the same time because she is keenly aware that it is the sign language that suffers in the end. The mouth movement or the English production with SimCom, she felt, "is obviously for the hearing person." The quality of the sign language is degraded when SimCom becomes the primary source of communication. The message delivered through SimCom becomes unclear. "It's hard to understand. I don't want that," she concluded.

Most often, the intended meaning of your comment is lost when using SimCom. One is so focused on speaking and using sign at the same time that it is not ASL anymore, and it makes signing a lot less intelligible. "Many times I get lost when people speak and sign at the same time. I don't understand what they are saying," the informant Debbie admitted. She added that she has, in the past, requested dropping the "speech" modality when she failed to grasp the message via SimCom. "When I tell them to drop the speech part and just sign, it becomes crystal clear. It's the dual modality that is very confusing and usually ineffective."

People who are bilingual often face that dilemma, as Edward explained in his own struggle:

I would say that I support it. I mean, I do that sometimes with my use of language. Saying that I support it puts me in a position that I'm either against it or support it. I don't want to say either way.

He acknowledged the fact that when one is signing and speaking at the same time, one's skills, the clarity, and the way that one expresses those languages diminish. "If you are using one language, then you can use that language to its fullest. It's most clear and in-depth," Edward admitted.

The language issue with deaf children addresses the fact that the acquisition of a first language is very important. By trying to teach ASL and English, SimCom confuses deaf children further because, when some people sign and speak at the same time, they are ultimately doing neither correctly.

Carl told his older brother, who is proficient in using SimCom: "You don't have to do that. Who are you trying to impress? You should just use sign language and let the interpreter speak for you." His brother's motivation to use SimCom was his lack of trust in the interpreters. "He is one of the rare people who can do it, but there aren't many who can," Carl said of his brother's SimCom. "Of course, he does sign a little more English in SimCom than if he were using ASL only."

SimCom doesn't work because ASL and English are two completely different languages. The underlying mechanism of SimCom requires the "speaking" part that imposes on Deaf people to use English, often for the convenience of hearing people. In



this sense, SimCom disempowers Deaf people from using ASL to the full extent and consequently weakens them in development of their Deaf identity. Some of the eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents were opposed vehemently to the use of SimCom for valid reasons. Yet the others who have accepted SimCom by allowing its existence reveal the dynamics of dysconscious audism because they thought of nothing in SimCom that affected Deaf people in everyday communication.

#### THE DEAF STUDIES CURRICULUM

The focus of the “Deaf” agenda would hold the idea that Deaf children are not to be perceived as disabled but as linguistically and culturally identified individuals. It is important that Deaf students interact with other Deaf individuals (youths and adults) early in their school career to take advantage of a critical period in language and social development. As a matter of fact, interaction with other Deaf people on just a social level does make a huge impact on their development and is a top priority; the earlier the better. Later, Deaf students would tap into Deaf Studies courses to further enrich their lives (e.g., Deaf History, Deaf Literature, Issues in the Deaf Community).

Alan elaborated on his list of reasons for why it is important to incorporate Deaf Studies in schools:

There's one simple reason: for Deaf pride. It means including in the curriculum “Deaf people who have succeeded”; where Deaf people are from; sign language; and all other aspects of our heritage. All of that is important for the Deaf child. Deaf Studies in schools for the Deaf help in the identity formation of Deaf children.

Yet Alan expressed his fear about the overemphasis on the Deaf part as he felt that they have to get on with life and school. “Deaf is part of their experience, understanding of who they are as a Deaf person. But I don't want to overemphasize it,” Alan said, in a cautionary manner. “Deaf power builds negative feelings inside of the children against the hearing world. I saw that happen. I find that very dangerous.” He stated that the oppression swings from one extreme to the other. For this very reason, Alan was not in favor of Deaf Studies curricula and continued on to say: “It's okay to be Deaf. It's okay. And Deafness is a way of life for these people, but it can be a nuisance and an inconvenience.”

Felicia claimed it is very important to establish a Deaf Studies curriculum. It's about their own history, their culture, and their heritage. The curriculum allows them to make strong connections to their life experience and build self-pride. Many ethnic groups promoted their awareness by establishing things like Black Pride Week or Chicano Heritage Month. They also created textbooks about their history and heritage. Their goals were to help children develop self-esteem and an understanding of their heritage. “Deaf children are not exposed to that and have difficulties in developing a Deaf identity.” To reduce their feelings of inferiority, she felt that a Deaf Studies curriculum is what they really need. Felicia suggested this approach:

You can incorporate different subject matters into the Deaf Studies curriculum. You can teach Deaf Studies even through math. When they learn about percentages in math class, you can

raise a question about the percentage of Deaf people attending a residential school as compared with a mainstream program and how to calculate that.

One could talk about the different events that happened in the Deaf world throughout history. Deaf students could do research papers with the application of their own Deaf experience. Felicia was well prepared to summarize the importance of the Deaf Studies curricula.

Bonnie said that she could see the benefits of a Deaf Studies curriculum and the positive impact that it would have on Deaf learners by “helping Deaf children understand their own identity and accept themselves.” She also felt that they could access their Deaf heritage through a Deaf Studies curriculum. In turn, it might help hearing people not only recognize them as a minority group but also accept them as people. “It’s an education for hearing people and Deaf people alike,” Bonnie said, firmly and affirmatively. “It’s the purpose of learning, and it facilitates that.”

“They can learn about Deaf culture and figure out who they are,” Glenn said. He took the position that a Deaf Studies curriculum is important. “They analyze the world around them and where they stand based on knowing who they are and having that identity.” One’s sense of strength and sense of self allows him or her to better handle different situations. He observed that some students who have not had a strong identity or a foundation tend to have a hard time dealing with Deaf issues and become frustrated. Much later, after they have struggled with them, they realize it’s not just a Deaf-hearing issue. It might have been about other things that had to do with communication in the home when they were children. They could not figure these things out for themselves. They thought it was something that went wrong because of their deafness. In reality, they were not having a complete understanding of who they were as Deaf people until much later in life. “If a Deaf Studies curriculum was incorporated into these schools,” Glenn said, stressing that it would attribute positively to Deaf people, “they would experience less agitation against hearing people.” He added that the preservation of Deaf Culture and Deaf community is a very important step for passing Deaf-related information on to younger generations: “If they don’t receive the information as younger children, they miss out until much later as Deaf adults.” This kind of cycle happens so often with many Deaf people. “It would benefit everyone a lot if they started early,” Glenn said emphatically.

“I think it’s very important! I wish that my Deaf daughter had exposure to a Deaf Studies curriculum in her school,” Helen said rather plaintively. “She doesn’t, so I teach it at home.” She tells her stories relating to Deaf history. For example, Helen related a story about a Deaf architect who designed many beautiful buildings and graduated from Gallaudet. She took her to see plays conducted in sign language. Helen incorporated Deaf Studies in her home environment for her daughter. “It’s not just about exposure for her to community events but I also support and affirm my daughter’s Deaf identity,” she concluded.

For Black History month, Martin Luther King Day is celebrated so that children who are of African American descent can take pride in the fact that there are people from history who, like them, are black and are acclaimed and honored. “The black experience for black children is akin to the Deaf experience for Deaf children,” Debbie summarized

poignantly. "They need to know about their history, their culture, and their people. I would say that a Deaf Studies curriculum would definitely be a valuable inclusion in schools."

"[Deaf Studies] should be paramount for all d/Deaf people of varying degrees of hearing loss," Edward said as one thought, but then he turned and assumed a different position. "To just inundate a hard-of-hearing person with ASL would be inappropriate." He suggested another approach, "We need to look at them individually and design a program for them so later on they will be able to discuss all aspects of Deaf Studies and Deaf culture." In the final outcome, they would know what their preferences and choices would be. Deaf people generally did not know anything about their own deafness, which led to the establishment of Deaf Studies, with the hope of helping them become more aware of their Deaf experience. "It is very, very important," was Edward's answer. He said, with deeper consideration, that the residential schools have had Deaf Studies since the early to mid-1800s. It was more of a natural occurrence through conversations and interactions, but it was never introduced formally into the classroom. By having Deaf role models around these schools, Deaf schools, so to speak, already had Deaf Studies programs. When Edward talked about Deaf Studies for residential schools, mainstream programs, Gallaudet University, a public university, he emphasized the fact that Deaf Studies differs from one venue to another. If you take away Deaf Studies from a person, Edward indicated that he would consider it a crime, because an education in Deaf Studies could make a difference for Deaf people. "Language and culture go hand in hand," was his closing remark.

Deaf Studies, Carl strongly believed, "will encourage deaf children to accept themselves as Deaf people, to develop a Deaf identity, to understand what ASL means, and to appreciate Deaf role models." Many deaf children did not have these understandings. They might think they are the only deaf person out there. "That's wrong. They need to know Deaf people can do anything. We have Deaf doctors, we have Deaf engineers, and so on. There are many choices. There are no limitations," Carl said, beaming with positive assertion.

Through the Deaf Studies curriculum, Deaf individuals begin to internalize who they are and accept themselves as Deaf people. In addition, they will develop a greater sense of pride in themselves and their culture, thus taking a more active part in society and serving as role models for the generations to follow. By utilizing a cultural perspective rather than a disability model, Deaf communities can, if properly promoted, increase their political influence in the bureaucracy and legislation affecting Deaf people.

Any Deaf individual who does not support the incorporation of a Deaf Studies curriculum in Deaf educational settings may be labeled as a dysconscious audist because an act of opposing the Deaf Studies curriculum limits Deaf individuals from expanding the Deaf perspectives.

This section has provided some insights into the views of the eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents on two topics of discussion: Simultaneous Communication and the Deaf Studies Curriculum. The similarities and differences in the responses of the eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents were noted. In many ways, their responses were kaleidoscopic. In the

broadest sense, the personal views they expressed were related to and shaped by the formation of their Deaf consciousness. Not all eight individuals had a strong stance in their Deafcentricity, even though all of them possessed some degree of a Deaf identity that had roots in their familial upbringings. All of them were fluent in the use of American Sign Language, yet some supportive of SimCom as a primary means of communication in the Deaf community.

Some were not comfortable with the importance of a Deaf Studies school curriculum for fear that it might cultivate in deaf children a rebellious attitude toward hearing people, while the others cherished it in hopes of helping deaf children increase their Deaf consciousness (and confidence) in order to become active participants in rightfully seeking their place in the world. Deaf Studies recognizes the existence of Deaf Culture and, to varying degrees, accepts it as an important aspect of socialization to strengthen the process of linguistic and cultural development. Their actions, beliefs, views, and perceptions toward the centrality of Deaf identity, along with American Sign Language, differed in some respects.

Deaf adults of Deaf parents who are college educated, knowledgeable about the Deaf World, and leaders in their endeavors supposedly comprise the most “progressive” group of the Deaf population. They function as Deaf bilingual-bicultural individuals who accept the realities of coexisting with hearing people. The weakening of their Deaf identities was present in some of them even though all of them continued to see themselves as big D Deaf, fluent users of ASL, and members of American Deaf Culture. Under the constant siege of audism, some of them, even with their clear thinking on their Deaf experience and their positive Deaf upbringing, had a weakened resistance to audism. This was demonstrated by their acceptance of audistic-generated practices. More often than not, they did not realize that they had internalized audist values and that these values had altered their perception. Such effects on the Deaf consciousness, in which they accept dominant hearing norms and privileges, may be best described as dysconscious audism.

### **Critical Pieces of Evidence for the Existence of Dysconscious Audism**

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The constant pressure of audism on the Deaf world brought out the salient features of dysconscious audism in some of the Deaf adults of Deaf parents. Figure 13.3 visually demonstrates the weakening of Deaf identity through the siege of audism. The critical pieces of evidence for the existence of dysconscious audism emerged in the interviews with the eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents. From the full study, following are some examples of dysconscious audism as depicted in their responses to questions on the cause of dysconscious audism.

Dysconscious audism disempowers Deaf people from becoming liberated.

- Lack of full support for Deaf Studies programs
- Lack of full support for ASL
- Acceptance of a cure for deafness

Dysconscious audism disables Deaf people from expressing Deaf cultural pride.

- Danger of offending hearing people
- Belief that heavy participation in the Deaf community is limiting
- The value of Deaf Studies courses being questioned

Dysconscious audism intimidates Deaf people and limits their promotion of the Deaf perspective.

- Fear of challenging hearing people's authority
- Denial of the impact of audism on the individual
- Lack of full support for Deafcentric curricula

Dysconscious audism hinders Deaf people from attaining quality education.

- Support for communication methods favored by hearing people
- Acceptance of English-based signing system
- Obsession with the idea of English mastery as a critical foundation for education

Dysconscious audism denies Deaf people full acceptance of ASL.

- Belief in the paramount importance of English
- Support of Simultaneous Communication
- Tolerance for different choices of communication methods with Deaf individuals

Dysconscious audism weakens Deaf people in the development of their Deaf identity.

- Acceptance of the term "hearing-impaired"
- Lack of resistance to the label "disability"
- Avoidance of fighting back against audism

Few hearing people understand what it means to truly be Deaf. To have a Deaf identity is equivalent to achieving a status of human being in the fullest sense. The weakening of the Deaf identity often causes them to feel like lesser human beings and to become more alien to the hearing world as well. It is ironic that deaf people who are shaped into "hearing people" are often less connected to the hearing world because they become marginalized in that society as well. Discrimination against Deaf people tends to increase when Deaf people are perceived in the medical model of deafness. The cultural model of deafness, on the other hand, defines Deaf people as contributing members of American society; educates Deaf people to be fully cognizant of the deep meanings of their rich Deaf Culture; creates a better environment for Deaf people to live in; and transforms their voices from silence to vibrancy, even with the full blast of audism working against them.

Being raised by Deaf parents, their lives are structured at a very early age on the positive possibilities of their future, a very sharp contrast to the often negative message passed down to d/Deaf children raised by hearing parents, who echo the sentiments of

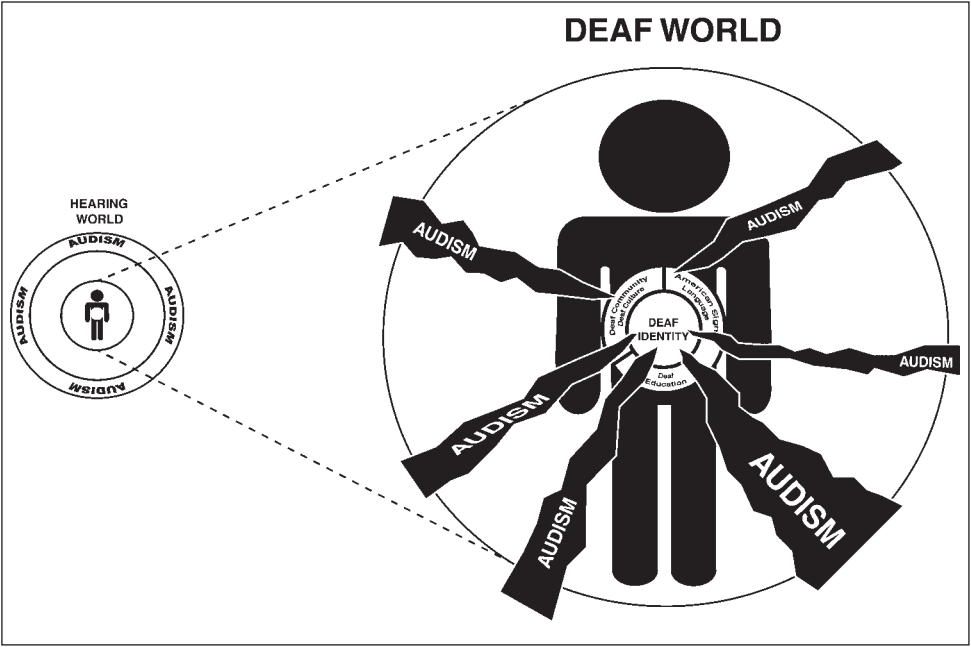


Figure 13.3. The weakening of Deaf Identity: dysconscious audism.

the larger hearing society. Unlike the barrier d/Deaf children of hearing parents experience at home, Deaf children of Deaf parents experience accessible communication at the earliest stage. The lives of successful Deaf adults of Deaf parents could unlock some of the mysteries associated with raising d/Deaf children by providing hearing people with greater insights and perspectives on issues related to Deaf identity, language, community/culture, and education. Needless to say, language, culture, and identity are interconnected and important to a person's existence. It is even more important to Deaf people's existence because they grow up and experience the larger society in a minority role.

The theorizing of dysconscious audism has stressed the importance of understanding the oppression, barriers, and discrimination that are caused by audism. An important link between audism and dysconscious audism can be traced to the power of hearing people over Deaf people in the domains of education, medicine, law, and the media. When Deaf people get a chance to deal with those issues within the aforementioned domains, they often find themselves brushed aside because they do not have the power and do not even share with hearing people the same language and culture of power. These factors have serious implications for the Deaf community, especially when the imposition on Deaf people of hearing people's discriminatory views intensifies and manifests into action, such as with cochlear implants. From a greater awareness of dysconscious audism, an increasing power of Deaf discourse could result. A greater Deaf consciousness and stronger stance taken by Deaf people may ensue and influence the Deaf-hearing dialogue. Deaf people must be clear on their values and positions before they initiate dialogue with hearing people on Deaf matters.

Arden Neisser, a hearing woman with no prior knowledge of the Deaf world, Deaf people, and deafness, made a journey into Deaf America in the early 1980s for several

years before writing a book, *The Other Side of Silence: Sign Language and the Deaf Community in America*. In the Prologue section of her book, she states with both eloquence and magnificence her thoughts about Deaf people:

Although the deaf live in a world without sound, it is the same world we all inhabit. To the problems of living in the environment they bring the full range of human resourcefulness, intelligence, and ingenuity. They have created for themselves a language that is not only comparable to all the world's great languages, but is perfectly adapted to their lives and needs. They do not speculate long about the nature of sound, or the mechanics of normal hearing. No living creature organizes its behavior around something it doesn't have. The deaf perceive the world through skilled and practiced eyes; language is at their fingertips.<sup>10</sup>

The life stories and thoughts of the eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents would have been lost if they had not been willing to participate in "culture talking."<sup>11</sup> Their openness about their "cultural" upbringings revealed the richness of their Deaf experiences. Their voices came alive and broadened our understanding of their lived experiences as Deaf adults of Deaf parents. In return, they had time to reflect on their understanding of "Who am I?" Too often, Deaf life stories are not recorded or considered important by the hearing world. As a result, it is nearly impossible to penetrate and positively influence the educational system in which educational planning for deaf children could better be implemented if these life stories were considered. These eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents may understandably not be indicative of all Deaf adults of Deaf parents. Still, they have not only supplied but also illuminated vital information regarding the lives and perspectives of Deaf adults of Deaf parents in today's world.

In conclusion, the full recognition of the Deaf identity is a vital step for making real changes to see that Deaf people are treated as human beings and as first-class citizens of the societies in which they live. The affirmation of the Deaf identity enables Deaf people to gain confidence in challenging audist practices. Deaf identity, Deaf community/Deaf Culture, ASL, and Deafcentric education must be respected and affirmed. To prevent exposing Deaf people to hearing ethnocentric attitudes, hearing people must be conscious of their past action. In order to combat audism, hearing people need to reach out to Deaf adults for the development of a partnership before navigating further into the Deaf world. The eight Deaf adults of Deaf parents must be profoundly thanked for their courage to share everything they could for this humankind. What they have done is provide a map with which to better understand the Deaf experience, one that was drawn up with their own burgeoning consciousness of the effects of dysconscious audism.

## Notes

1. Joyce King, "Dysconscious Racism: The Cultural Politics of Critiquing Ideology and Identity," in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delegado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 128–32.
2. World Around You, interview with Rachel Stone, "A 'Lucky One' Remembers," September 2005, <http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/WorldAroundYou/mar-apr2000/interviews.html>.
3. These various Web sites have been collected into a single site, which may be accessed at <http://>



- www.deafnotes.com. Deafnotes, "Unfair Firing of California School for the Deaf-Riverside Superintendent" (June 2001), <http://www.deafnotes.com/bb/ubb/Forum3/HTML/000085.html>.
4. H-Dirksen L. Bauman, "Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression," *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 9, no. 2 (2004): 239–46.
  5. Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2003); Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister, and Benjamin Bahan, *A Journey into the Deaf-World* (San Diego: DawnSignPress, 1996); Owen Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1996).
  6. Edna Levine, *The Psychology of Deafness: Techniques of Appraisal for Rehabilitation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); Harlan Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community* (San Diego: DawnSignPress, 1999).
  7. Eugenie Nicole Gertz, "Dysconscious Audism and Critical Deaf Studies: Deaf Crit's Analysis of Unconscious Internalization of Hegemony within the Deaf Community" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2003). This is also the source for following quotations from the eight adult Deaf children of Deaf parents.
  8. Katherine Jankowski, *Deaf Empowerment: Emergence, Struggle, and Rhetoric* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1997); Lane, *Mask of Benevolence*.
  9. Gloria Marmor and Laura Petitto, "Simultaneous Communication in the Classroom: How Well Is English Grammar Represented?" *Sign Language Studies* 23 (1979): 99–136; Charlotte Baker, "How Does 'Sim-Com' Fit into a Bilingual Approach to Education?" in *Proceedings of the Second National Symposium on Sign Language Research and Teaching*, ed. Frank Caccamise and Doin Hicks (Silver Spring, Md.: National Association of the Deaf, 1980), 13–26; Charlotte Baker-Shenk, "Sociolinguistics: Simultaneous Communication," in *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness*, vol. 3, *S-Z Index*, ed. John V. van Cleve (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987), 176–79.
  10. Arden Neisser, *The Other Side of Silence: Sign Language and the Deaf Community in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 5.
  11. The term "culture talking" is elaborated by Tom Humphries in this volume.