THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEAFNESS: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE DISCIPLINARY HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to provide a literature review of investigations into the specific disability of deafness in the field of sociology and other closely related fields.*

Methodology/approach – *After a pilot search using databases appropriate to social science research, we developed key search terms and, using an inductive approach, we identified major themes in the literature.*

Findings – *Our review shows that deafness has been investigated for a long time in sociology and other related fields, that there is a wide range of themes in scholarly work on the experiences of deaf communities and deaf people, and that conceptualizations of deafness and d/Deaf communities have changed over time. We organize this paper around six major themes we identified, and a few highlighted pieces of scholarship illustrate these themes along the way. We particularly focus on scholarship from the late 1960s through the early 1990s as emblematic of seismic*

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shifts in studying deafness, although we do highlight little known nineteenth century work as well.

Research implications – *This paper captures the legacy of this past scholarship and reveals that deafness is a rich site of inquiry that can contribute to the field of sociology. It is also a valuable resource for any future sociological research into deafness, deaf people, and deaf communities. We conclude with a discussion of our findings, commentary on the extent to which previous scholarship on the sociology of deafness has or has not figured into current scholarship and suggestions for future research.*

Keywords: Sociology; deafness; Deaf; history

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this RSSD volume is to delve into the ways disability has been investigated in sociology. Scholarship on disability has rapidly expanded in the last two decades, but that might not be true about scholarship on deafness within sociology. The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive literature review of how deafness has been considered and investigated in the field of sociology and other closely related fields. The main goals of this paper are to show (1) that deafness has been investigated for a long time (in some cases, as far back as the late nineteenth century) and (2) that conceptualizations of deafness and d/Deaf communities have changed over time. We use the word d/Deaf to capture the distinction often made between the word deaf, which describes an audiological status, and the cultural identity of Deaf, which is generally used by individuals who not only are deaf, but also claim Deaf as an identity reflecting their membership in a culture centered around the experience of deafness *and* the use of sign language to communicate.

As early as 1835, Harriet Martineau, a deaf sociologist, wrote an analysis of deafness from a sociological perspective. Classic sociologists such as Simmel and Mead followed shortly thereafter. As the investigation of deafness and d/Deaf communities grew in the latter part of the twentieth century, as our review will show, the conceptualization of deafness has become more complex. Additionally, we also show that there were certain time periods, namely the 1970s and 1980s, where scholarship on the sociology of deafness flourished, though this is not always appreciated or adequately linked to more contemporary scholarship.

We have divided the literature into six major themes or strands of focus. These are (1) deafness as a problem, (2) constructing deafness, (3) deafness and social institutions, (4) deafness and intersectionality, (5) science, technology, and deafness, and (6), researching deaf people and communities.

METHODS

A pilot literature search was carried out using relatively basic terms such as "deaf," "deafness," "deaf perspective(s)," and "deaf research." It yielded thousands of sources, most of which came from the medical and cognitive sciences and sociolinguistics. Based on this initial finding, it was necessary to compile a list of terms to *exclude* to ensure an appropriate and relevant search. Some of the terms on that list were as follows: rehab*, therapy, psych*, patholog*, nursing, socioling*, medic*, disorder, and others. Once these exclusions were established, it was determined that the search should include a set of key words and key word combinations (detailed below) and a broad swath of time, between the years 1800 and 2014.

Initially, the search was done in 50-year increments, but this was shortened to 10–20 year increments from about 1980 onward, because more work, both sociological and medical, was being produced. For example, between the years 1800 and 1950 the terms social/deaf; deafness/sociology; deafness/culture; deaf/diversity/society; "deaf studies"; and "social deafness" returned only 24 results. However, this jumped exponentially to hundreds of results in a single ten to twenty year timeframe after 1970 when the same search terms were used.

Conducting a thorough literature search requires rigor and imagination that really must account for the variety of words we use to indicate similar subject matter. More than 100 search term combinations over the time span mentioned above were used. While the key word combinations used were not exhaustive, there were still far too many to mention them all here. The most relevant searches, insofar that they returned the majority of material that matched our criteria (as outlined above), generally fell between the years 1980 and 2010 and were found using some variation of the words "deaf, deafness, disability, sociology, society, social, culture, ethnic, community, and identity." The main search engines used were Google Scholar and Social Science Citation Index, searching titles and abstracts. Titles and abstracts of articles in selected peer reviewed and open access journals such as *Disability Studies Quarterly, Disability and Society, Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, and American Annals of the Deaf* were

also searched. Additionally, the articles located through the above searches were also used as source materials for finding other publications by conducting manual searches of bibliographies. In all, the search yielded approximately 250 publications relevant to our objectives including journal articles, books, book chapters, book reviews, conference presentations, reports, and working papers.

There were notable methodological obstacles encountered in our search process. Roughly 190 of the 250 papers and publications located in the search could not be accessed for review. We were unable to access these papers and publications for a number of reasons including: blocked online access to particular years of certain journals like *Disability and Society* and *American Annals of the Deaf;* no electronic access to some journal articles that were published before mainstream digitization; unpublished materials such as working papers, dissertations and theses; materials that may be out of print (such as those published prior to 1900); and materials that may not have had a wide distribution (e.g., those published by Gallaudet and only accessible to those physically on its campus). Lack of access to a large percentage of the sources identified in our search is acknowledged as a limitation of this literature review since this certainly shaped the interpretation of the categories and themes we identified. These obstacles suggest a marginalization of the topic of deafness and/or the absence of a thriving market within the discipline related to deaf community studies.

There were also other challenges, such as deciding how stringent the boundaries of our search should be. We decided to have "porous" boundaries around the discipline of sociology to include research on deafness in social science research more broadly. Some scholarship is squarely situated within the field of sociology, including medical sociology, while other scholarship is perhaps at the edges of the discipline and overlaps with disability studies, anthropology, Deaf studies, and social psychology. Therefore, while our overall goal was to stay as focused on sociological literature as possible, some of the work we review straddles these other fields and we hope it will provide useful dialogue in the future.

FINDINGS

Theme One: Deafness as a Problem

The first theme, "deafness as a problem," characterizes the earliest works in sociology that consider deafness. In this category, we found that deafness is

imagined almost entirely as a deficit (particularly in relation to communication), deaf persons are imagined or referenced almost entirely as individuals in a hearing society (rather than as a group or collective of deaf people), and deafness is not a legitimate subject of inquiry. Instead, it is used merely an example of "what can go wrong" in interactions between people and used as a vector into analyzing interactions. Scholarship on this theme persists over a longer period of time than any of the other themes we identified, spanning roughly a hundred years from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.

In 1834, a deaf sociologist named Harriet Martineau wrote a "Letter to the Deaf," which is perhaps the first known sociological analysis of deafness. True to the tendency of the time, Martineau framed her deafness as a problem in social interaction, yet she also romanticized it as that which gave her unique talents as a sociologist and observer of social behaviors. "She, more than able bodied observers, needed these outside signs of behavior and meaning to confirm her perceptions" (Deegan, 2014, p. 48). Her deafness shaped how she observed the world and was integrated into her observational methodology. Although a problem in spoken interactions with those who do not sign, her deafness, she claimed, made her more astute and aware in observing other aspects of behavior and interaction because she was not distracted by ordinary conversation. Nevertheless, her work squarely tackled deafness as a problem in social interaction "that can be confronted, ameliorated, or resolved" (Deegan, 2014, p. 56) through various techniques and behaviors that she suggested deaf persons utilize in order to make communication easier for hearing individuals with whom they are trying to communicate. The emphasis was on how deaf people could help the hearing in these mixed interactions.

Deegan's analysis (2014) of Martineau's contributions aptly framed her work as "anticipating G. H. Mead's theory of the flexibility of self and its emergence from social interaction" (Deegan, 2014, p. 43), a reference to George Herbert Mead's classic sociological text that appeared a century later, *Mind, Self and Society* (1934). Mead's work of course became the foundation of the symbolic interactionist school of thought within sociology that took hold in the mid-twentieth century. Martineau's discussion of how to manage interactions with hearing persons also anticipated Goffman's classic text on the presentation of self and negotiation of a spoiled identity in interactions (1959).

But even before Mead's work appeared in 1934 and symbolic interactionism rose to prominence in the mid-twentieth century, another sociologist, George Simmel, wrote of deafness as a problem in interactions. Simmel,

whose work was so important that he is a part of the sociological canon, wrote in 1921 that, "Of the special sense-organs, the eye has a uniquely sociological function …[but] the sociological attitude of the blind is entirely different from that of the deaf-mute" (Simmel, 1921, pp. 358–360). To make his case, he suggested that modern life is more visual because of urbanization. He argued that because of industrialization, we are more likely to physically encounter people in urban environments and therefore our visual capacities are of utmost importance. He surmised that those who are blind simply miss out on such interactions and systems of meanings, while those who are deaf see them, but remain "perplexed" by them.

Simmel suggested that it is more difficult to be deaf than blind because so much information is visually conveyed. Without sound, these visual conveyances can only be confusing. This is particularly true in interactions in which information is conveyed on the face. Without the corresponding message of speech or information through sound, a deaf person could not make sense of what is happening (Simmel, 1921). He felt that as a result of the hindrance that deafness is during interactions, isolation and the lack of collectivity will prevail. "The greater perplexity which characterizes the person who only sees, as contrasted with the one who only hears, brings us to the problems of the emotions of modern life: the lack of orientation in the collective life, the sense of utter lonesomeness, and the feeling that the individual is surrounded on all sides by closed doors" (Simmel, 1921, pp. 360–361).

For Simmel, deafness was characterized as a problem. Interactions not only convey information about oneself but also depend on our ability to gather information about others. The self is made through interactions: we see and are seen, we hear and are heard. In his writings, deafness was used as a device to call attention to what can go wrong in interactions and thus in the development of a sense of self. He suggested that it is through our senses/bodies that we perceive others and engage in social interaction. The presence of deafness is a problem because the self is made through social interactions and these interactions are predicated on our sensory abilities as embodied subjects. (There was no critique of how a hearing-dominated, speech dominated society could adjust for other types of interaction, only the lamentation of those that could not participate.) It was only a decade later that Mead's foundational text was published posthumously. To our knowledge, neither Simmel nor Mead relied on Martineau's writing – writings that were from a deaf perspective – from a century earlier.

Sociological thinking about deafness in this time period parallels prevailing notions about disability, namely pity.[1] Martineau does stand out here; in her *Letter to the Deaf* she does offer practical advice to others who are

deaf. Her later work also attempted to gather statistics on deafness and blindness in the United States and Europe. So, unlike Mead and Simmel, she attempted to study deaf persons as a population. In addressing others who also were deaf, she was refuting the assumption that a deaf community or collectivity did not exist. Finally, while her deafness was still construed as a problem, she also romanticized it at some points, arguing that she had exceptional observational skills because of it.

Theme Two: Constructing Deafness

The second – and by far most prolific – theme we found in the literature is that of "Constructing Deafness." Literature fitting into this theme is marked by significant changes in conceptualizing and studying deafness. This is primarily because of three changes: (1)emphasis on how the meanings of deafness and disability are socially constructed, (2) considering deaf persons as a collective social group rather than as pathological individuals, and (3) making a distinction between the audiological status of "deaf" and the cultural identity or descriptor of "Deaf." This theme spans the time period from 1970s through today.

The literature in this theme reflects popular theoretical schools of thought in sociology, such as symbolic interactionism and social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). But this shift also reflects the broader social changes occurring at this time, such as the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s – such as the civil rights, gay and lesbian, women's, and disability rights movements (Goodwin & Jasper, 2009). Legislative changes, like the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and disability activism during this time championed re-framing disability from an individual problem to a characteristic that provides a basis for identity, community, and culture (Shapiro, 1994). The literature discussed in this thematic category is situated within the emergence of a Deaf social movement in United States. As such, it often focused on conceptualizing and theorizing Deaf identity and Deaf culture.

The sociological scholarship that falls within this theme began to articulate issues related to the Deaf community and culture, especially through a focus on interactional aspects of deafness. Some scholarship on this theme was published in the late 1960s through the late 1980s (Becker, 1987; Darbyshire, 1970; Higgins, 1979a, 1979b; Jacobs, 1974; Kannapell, 1982; Meadow, 1975; Padden & Markowicz, 1975; Rutherford, 1988; Vernon & Makowsky, 1969). Some demographic studies published during this time

period attempted to quantify the prevalence of deafness (Schein, 1989; Schein & Delk, 1974; Schein & Waldman, 1986). In the late sixties, sociological scholars both within and outside of sociology began to argue for the *interactional equality and competence* of deaf persons and communities who use sign language.[2]

Unlike the previous theme in which deafness was a problem, the literature in this theme shifted the focus from individual deafness to norms in interactional patterns and the processes of meaning making therein. For example, some of the earliest scholarship in this strand, such as Kohl (1966) and Meadow (1968a, 1968b, 1969), focused on the interactional and communication-related needs of deaf persons and children in particular social institutions like schools and families. These studies documented the effectiveness of sign language and other adaptations that deaf persons make (indeed, the superiority of such visual communication for deaf persons) and critiqued the failure of wider society to adapt to these modes of interaction or recognize them as equal communicational techniques. Interactional analysis was seen in relation to norms and expectations.

Thus, rather than construing deafness as the problem, the interactional norms that gave rise to a pathological meaning of deafness were questioned and challenged. These kinds of studies continued and evolved. For example, Krupnick and Krieger (1976) expanded the analysis of disparities in interaction in the context of work or occupation. Christiansen and Polakoff (1980) focused on the value of diverse practices of social work in schools, which could support the communication needs of deaf individuals. Meadow (1975, 1977) shifted from her previous analyses of interactions within families and schools to articulating the culture and identity that emerges out of using sign language to communicate. For example, Meadow (1975) writes that deafness is not just a medical diagnosis, but "a cultural phenomenon in which social, emotional, linguistic, and intellectual patterns and problems are inextricably linked together" (1975, p. 16). She also delves into meaning-making processes within the deaf community in her study of the significance of a name sign in identity development for deaf children. It is a "formalized gesture referring to an individual's proper name" (1977, p. 238) and is a rite of passage into the deaf community. Meadow, ahead of her time, brought sociological analysis to interactions within the deaf community and drew attention to the ways in which name signs become a source of deaf identity for young deaf persons.

At the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, sociological scholarship on deafness thus began to focus on the importance of community, culture, and the interactional and competence of deaf persons. To understand this

further, Foster and Elliot (1986), for example, examined the experiences of deaf students in schools. Foster (1987) then analyzed interactions between deaf and hearing persons from life history interviews with deaf adults. Their family and peer relationships were analyzed using an interactionist approach; social rejection and exclusion emerged as dominant and consistent themes across multiple categories of life experience. She also examined deaf college graduates' experiences on the job market through an interactionist approach (1987) and conducted in-depth interview with deaf adults on their experiences in mainstream school settings (1989).

Perhaps one of the most important works that delved into the construction of deafness through an interactional lens was Paul Higgins' book *Outsiders in a Hearing World* (1980). While some of his earlier writings applied the sociological concept of deviance to deaf persons (Higgins, 1979a, 1979b), in *Outsiders in a Hearing World*, he presented the first book-length study that shows how deafness is constructed through interactions among hearing and deaf persons, but also between deaf persons themselves. Based on his research in Chicago area deaf communities, Higgins, who is a hearing child of deaf parents, interviewed deaf people and described and presented their lives as they lived them – as told in their words, signs, gestures, and actions. He situated the study by introducing the idea of Deaf communities and located the experiences of deaf persons within both Deaf communities and hearing environments. In the latter, he notes the awkwardness in social encounters between deaf and hearing members, the limitations and barriers in social communication, as well as stigma associated with being deaf. In studying interactions and the processes of meaning making between deaf and hearing persons, Higgins showed that Deaf identity and community arise primarily out of deaf experience even within a predominantly hearing world. However, hearing people have membership in the dominant group and, as a result, such power dynamics are essential to understanding deaf persons, identity and community.

In 1982, the first Conference on the Sociology of Deafness was held at Gallaudet University, and the presented papers were published (Higgins & Nash, 1982). This collection included essays and papers on deafness and the socialization process, employment, family life, social change, and interpersonal communication. The scholars at this conference, including Irving Zola who gave the keynote address, were the first to rigorously utilize sociological analysis and methods to examine deaf experiences, communities, and the process of meaning-making around deafness in society. These studies represented a huge shift from deafness conceptualized as a problem, to the ways in which deafness is constructed through interactions,

norms around communication, and institutional policies and structures. Little prior sociological work had been done that conceptualized deafness in this way, and certainly these papers ran counter to the dominant medical discourse and scholarship on deafness. These texts framed deafness in sociology going forward, and the ideas they pioneered have reappeared and influenced subsequent scholarship in different ways.

This was also a time when a *minority model* of the deaf community began to emerge. Stroman's early book (1982) on how disabled persons constitute a minority group included a chapter on deafness and the deaf community. Later, Barnartt and Christiansen (1985) analyzed the socioeconomic status of deaf workers using a minority group perspective, with findings such as that deaf workers were generally concentrated in blue collar occupations and that deaf women were disadvantaged compared to both hearing women and deaf men. In a separate work, they also used a minority group perspective to analyze the socioeconomic status of deaf persons that "emphasizes social structural rather than personality variables" (Christiansen & Barnartt, 1987, p. 190). This analysis was part of the book *Understanding Deafness Socially* (Higgins & Nash, 1987), a collection of some of the first sociological scholarship to treat deaf persons and communities as a category of analysis equal to the triumvirate of race, class and gender (which had just barely been mentioned at this time). The papers in this book showed, much like work in disability studies scholarship today, how deafness can be analyzed and theorized just like other social differences. In his introduction, Higgins drew an analogy to racism, stating that assumptions about disability (which he called at the time "handicapism") and deafness (which he called "deafism") must be more rigorously analyzed. While certainly using analogies to link different types of oppressions is worth more discussion, the point is that these works were precursors to the calls of disability studies scholars and sociologists of disability today for sociology to expand to four fundamental categories of analysis (see, for example, Volume 7 of *Research in Social Science and Disability*).

The activism side of the Deaf movement was also later chronicled in key sociological texts *Disability Protests: Contentious Politics 1970–1999* (Barnartt & Scotch, 2001) and *Deaf President Now!: The 1988 Revolution at Gallaudet University* by Christiansen and Barnartt (2003). These texts, along with Gannon's (1989) earlier book on the Deaf President Now movement and Higgins' previously mentioned *Outsiders in a Hearing World* – a central rallying point for the origins of the Deaf cultural movement – provide invaluable sociological overviews of the seismic shifts in conceptualizing and theorizing deafness during this time through historical accounts

and approaches utilizing social movement theory. At later points in this essay, we link this strand research once again to the current scholarship, draw connections, and show how this previous work foreshadowed and shaped contemporary conceptualizations and sociological investigations of deaf people and deaf communities.

We wish to emphasize that the texts in this theme thus far show a significant shift from the prior century where deafness was framed purely as a problem and used as a device to develop broader sociological theories about interaction (and deviance within interactional norms). This strand of the literature is largely characterized by a move away from an individual, deficit model of deafness and instead toward considering a deafness as a community or collective phenomenon. As a direct result of such studies, various models of deafness emerged in an attempt to theorize Deaf experience, and to define boundaries of Deaf culture and identity. For example, in a follow up to Meadow's (1975) piece, Rutherford (1988) makes a case for Deaf culture and identity being bound to and, primarily, maintained by its language. That same year, the now classic text *Deaf in America*, was published that articulated the history, characteristics, and power of Deaf community (Padden & Humphries, 1988). At the heart of this theme in the literature is how this is used to challenge the mainstream, hearing perception that deaf people are isolated people and instead offer up that deaf persons are part of a thriving Deaf community. Other early collections attempted to bring together thinking on this (Higgins & Nash, 1987). Finally, Lane's (1993) *The Mask of Benevolence* and article on constructions of deafness (1995) put forth two models of deafness – a medical model and cultural model – to begin theorizing social meanings of deafness. Although Lane is a psychologist, the ideas found in his models of deafness persist throughout sociological literature and disability studies. But the idea that deaf persons and communities constituted a culture far preceded Harlan's work, evidenced by the sociologists we have mentioned here.

The conceptualizations of deafness found in the sociological literature are in dialogue with and part of the larger medical and social models of disability often used in sociology and disability studies today (Oliver, 1990; Thomas, 2007), but there is also tension between sociology of disability and sociology of deafness and d/Deaf people. Because of the presence of a uniting language (in the United States it is American Sign Language), many in Deaf studies and the Deaf community, argue that this differentiates deafness from other disabilities and suggests it should be analyzed and theorized separately from disability in general (Lane, 2002; Maxwell-McCaw, Leigh, & Marcus, 2000; Senghas & Monaghan, 2002; Turner, 1994). As a

consequence, in sociology and other disciplines, deafness continues to be theorized through separate models such as the linguistic minority model (Dolnick, 1993; Padden & Humphries, 1988; Wilcox, 1989), the theory of Deafhood (Ladd, 2003), and articulations of Deaf culture as an ethnic group (Eckert, 2010; Hall, 1991; Lane, 2005; Terstriep, 1993). The beginnings of such articulations of deafness can be found within these earlier sociological works.

Throughout the 1990s until the early 2000s, scholarship continued to focus on legitimizing Deaf culture through continued theoretical exploration about Deaf culture and identity – building upon the earlier works we have highlighted here. This coincided with the popularity of identity politics that characterized the 1990s. For example, Turner (1994) built on earlier works to revisit the definition of Deaf culture and Reagan (2002) examined cultural, ideological, and linguistic differences that separate various constructions of deafness. Others continued to wrestle with the "riddle" of defining and theorizing Deaf identity (Bat-Chava, 2000; Benvenuto, 2005; Breivik, 2005; Clerck, 2010; Davis, 2007; Holcomb, 1997; Jones, 2002; Leigh, 2009; Maxwell-McCaw et al., 2000; Miller, 2010; Obasi, 2008; Senghas & Monaghan, 2002; Siple, 1994; Skelton & Valentine, 2003).

Theme Three: Deafness and Social Institutions

This theme highlights literature that locates the experiences of deaf persons within broader social processes (such as discourse and the construction of deafness), but primarily within institutions (such as education and healthcare). The literature in this theme is both theoretical and empirical and the texts described here provide an overview of the kinds of topics investigated within this theme. Many of the texts mentioned here, however, also addressed the previous theme as well. This is because the literature propelling sociological analyses and conceptualization of deafness that centered on interactions also focused on deaf persons' interactions with institutions. The fact that this sociological research appears across multiple strands of the literature further demonstrates its importance to evolving understandings of deafness as a social process. In addition, we have included some interdisciplinary scholarship, which integrated concepts from sociology, social policy, and Deaf educational studies.

The first category of consideration here is scholarship examining the broader discourse around deafness. In sociology in the 1990s, much attention was paid to identity politics and post-structuralist accounts of identity

and experience dominated. It was the era of social constructionism (Hacking, 2000). Scholars across a variety of disciplines in and outside of sociology were emphasizing the social construction of deafness. For example, Brueggeman's *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* (1999), analyzed the intersections between post-enlightenment traditions of rhetoric and constructions of deafness. According to Brueggeman, rhetoric, as an example of speech, is a defining characteristic of reason and human sense-making. Deafness, characteristically associated with silence, translates to a number of communication difficulties – those of speaking, listening, reading and writing – that assumes an inability to give and take-in knowledge. Such assumptions have been problematic for d/Deaf communities in a number of ways. Above all, says Brueggeman, it has restricted d/Deaf expression and denied d/Deaf people the right of "speaking" for themselves. Rosen's (2003) work interrogates medicalized jargon deployed under the auspices of improving the lives of deaf persons and the ways in which use of words such as conductive, sensorineural, disability/handicap, and prelingual/postlingual signify the medical criteria of deafness that, in-turn, confer rights and services to some deaf people and deny them to others. The investigation of the discursive construction of deafness can be seen in dialogue with medical sociology, which had been and continues to be concerned with discursive social processes such as naming/labeling, processes of diagnosis, etc., in which certain bodily conditions were considered pathological, while others are not (Brown, 1995; Conrad, 1992; Freidson, 1988; Schur, 1972).

In the "deafness as a problem" theme, linguistic barriers of deaf persons were used to construct deafness as an isolated, pathological condition. The texts in this theme, show that, to the contrary, a shared sign language, distinct set of community needs, and pushback against medicalized constructions of deafness is generative and collective. This opens up d/Deaf spaces and communities – such as schools – as sites for sociological inquiry (Christiansen & Polakoff, 1980; Foster, 1987, 1989; Kohl, 1966). In an ethnographic study by of a residential deaf school, Evans (1988) presents a picture of a relatively closed and isolated community of young deaf persons' whose primary mode of communication was sign language. He argued that deaf education, within state school environments, was rather inwardly focused. That is, students were socialized in ways that were largely applicable to life within that specific environment, rather than being a source of preparation for everyday social life. Evans argued that relying on sign language as the primary mode of communication created gaps in deaf children's knowledge of the broader social world.

Kyle and Pullen (1988) found that in the United Kingdom, modernization and professionalization of deaf-related "rehabilitative" services enhanced deaf social experience by fostering strong Deaf communities. Others scholars have argued that deaf spaces and a sign-language-based communities can enhance Deaf identity, contribute to the identity politics of Deafness and improve institutional practice (Brueggemann, 2004; Christensen, 1988; Padden & Ramsey, 1993).

Experiences of deafness in and outside of institutional environments is a second broad area of inquiry. In *Some Social Aspects of Deafness*, Abernathy (1941) discussed problems with speech-reading, one of the primary methods used in deaf education. The proficiency of speech-reading supported a belief among proponents of oralism that it was an ideal means of mainstreaming deaf children and ultimately normalizing the social problem of deafness. However, as Abernathy points out, the sound it generated to the hearing ear exacerbated deaf/hearing differences and in-fact marginalized deaf persons in the classroom. Later in life, those who relied on speech-reading as a primary communication tool were sometimes less inclined to use it because of stigma. Becker (1981) also examined stigma but, in contrast with Abernathy, suggested that the invisibility of deafness produces a unique experience of stigma. According to Becker, the immediate visibility of cues like wheelchairs and seeing-eye dogs affect interactions and stigma differently than deafness, which may not be as readily apparent to others. Wilkens and Hehir (2008) analyzed contemporary deaf educational methods, highlight some of the complexities of educational reform, and recommend how to go about such reform. Hauser, O'Hearn, McKee, Steider, and Thew (2010) suggested that when deaf persons rely on the visual sense to learn and acquire knowledge, they develop a method of learning and knowing that stems from a pride in being Deaf that can empower them as they navigate a world that is auditory-dominant.

Empirical attention has also been given to deaf/hearing relationships and interactions in the workplace, higher education, social work practice, and the healthcare, legal and prison systems. As mentioned in the previous section, Krupnick and Krieger (1976) and Foster (1987) and Barnartt and Christiansen (1985) all looked at the workplace, as did Lunde and Bigman (1959) some years earlier.[3] Crammatte (1987) and Bowe, Marcus, and Jerome (1973) also explored deafness in the workplace. They called attention to discrimination, surveying "blue-collar and white collar" hiring and promotional practices of deaf persons. Greg and Rothman (1978) and Foster and DeCaro (1991) investigated attitudes toward deafness and d/Deaf and hearing interactions in college residence halls and dormitory

rooms. Souza (2010b, 2008) also documented the experiences of college aged Deaf persons while Foster (1989) explored how deaf people perceive and contextualize their relationships with peers, family, members of mainstream society, and Deaf communities. Vernon and Miller (2005) traced problems and challenges encountered by Deaf people who come into contact with the criminal justice system, including problems encountered during arrest, trial, incarceration, and probation and/or parole. Like other studies discussed in the previous sections, communication barriers were found to be problematic, particularly in cases in which legal professionals who do not know sign-language represent Deaf persons who do not understand their legal rights or have no or low-levels of literacy. Turning to the healthcare system, Harmer (1999) contends that deaf persons routinely receive inadequate and inappropriate healthcare due to a variety of complex factors, including: physicians' lack of knowledge about deafness or hearing loss, interpreters either not being provided or unavailable, and other problems associated with lack of socioeconomic resources, education, or information (often due to the inaccessibility of the information). In *Working with Deaf People*, Parratt (1995) found tensions between Deaf cultural norms, institutional services, and social workers. Similar themes related to a variety of institutions (schools, health care settings, workplace) are addressed from different theoretical perspectives by a number of scholars, including Nash and Nash (1981), Nash's (1999), Buchanan(2012), Brunson (2011), Van Cleve and Crouch (1989), Meadow-Orlans (2000), and Horejes (2012).

Finally, an area that emerged alongside these studies of deafness in various institutions concerns social policy practice and recommendations with a particular emphasis on acknowledging and accommodating variations in hearing loss. Luey (1980) and Luey, Glass, and Elliott (1995) reflected on empirical data collected over a number of years from people with acquired hearing loss about preferred methods of communication, psychological well-being, interactions and relationships, and cultural and political allegiances. They illustrate the related but often diverse dimensions involved in socially assessing and serving the needs of people who are deaf or hard-of hearing. Christiansen (1991), as well as Smith and Campbell (1997), proposed a need for more nuanced approaches to deaf social and education policy. According to Christiansen (1991), there are millions of Americans with hearing loss who are more diverse in their identification, interest, and experiences of deafness and [Deaf] identity than they are similar. On this final point, that there is a diversity of d/Deaf experiences, we now turn to in the next theme.

Theme Four: Deafness and Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a term frequently attributed to feminist sociologist Crenshaw (1989), refers to how categories of identity or oppression cannot be examined separately. The literature under this theme overlaps with literature in previous themes since intersectional research is concerned with the interaction and interrelatedness among systematic inequalities and oppressions, institutional discrimination, everyday life and identity formation. The literature that follows provides an insider view of systems and institutions as provided by d/Deaf persons who, in addition to identifying as d/Deaf, also may also occupy other marginalized social categories. The intersections between Deafhood, sexuality, and/or gay identity and culture, for example, are addressed by Phaneuf (1987), Luczak (1993, 2007), and Sinecka (2008). Phaneuf (1987) explores the intersection of deafness, identity, and sexual orientation in a review of literature on sexuality and Deaf culture, citing the work of Robinson (1979), Zakarewsky (1979), Fitzgerald and Fitzgerald (1979), Shaul (1981), and Lewis (1982).

Heuttel and Rothstein (2001) and Moinester, Gulley, and Watson (2010) also broach the subject of sexuality and sexual education but within the context of HIV/AIDS risk. Both articles argue that young Deaf persons are in urgent need of practical resources and accurate information about HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention but arrive at these conclusions slightly differently. Heuttel and Rothstein (2001) tested and compared HIV/AIDS awareness between deaf and hearing students at two separate universities. They found that hearing students, who were well-informed about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention, obtained most of their information from teachers, television, and formal reading material. Deaf students, who relied mostly on family and friends for information, had far less knowledge or knowledge that was inaccurate often because of communication barriers. Moinester et al. (2010) start with the theory that d/Deaf and hard of hearing persons are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and associated stigma because of institutional barriers (Harmer, 1999 cited in the previous section). They argue that little to no formal sex education in deaf schools, and the fact that university environments and public health campaigns, for example, all may rely on auditory-dominant technologies, prevent or hinder access to comprehensive sexual education. The authors make an important point in saying that problems of access affect deaf and disabled persons equally and thus call for the universal design of policies and practices that can be easily tailored to accommodate all living and learning environments.

Eyes of Desire: A Deaf Gay & Lesbian Reader Volumes 1 and 2 (Luczak, 1993, 2007) are important collections of essays dedicated to the personal stories of gay men and women who tell of their experiences of being deaf and being gay including stories about coming out as gay, overcoming communication barriers as deaf, coming to terms with identifying as Deaf and gay, and negotiating membership in both Deaf and gay communities. While this is not a sociological study per se, it provides data for understanding these identities, experiences, and communities. Sinecka (2008) explicitly uses narrative methodology to explore what it means, as a Deaf person, to come out to family and peers as gay, how inclusive the Deaf community is of gay persons, as well as how inclusive the hearing gay community is of Deaf persons. A significant finding, according to Sinecka, is that being gay in Deaf culture can be more challenging than being Deaf in hearing society. Yet identifying as Deaf and gay, taken together, correlate to being a minority within a minority that produces double discrimination that complicates cultural affiliation(s) and poses unique challenges to one's sense of self. A variety of texts address the overlapping or analogous identity work that accompanies being deaf and queer (Bienvenu, 2008).

Religion and the establishment of Deaf churches also play a role in Deaf culture and communities, yet it appears to be an area that is underresearched. Texts for which only online citations are available, but that may well be useful sources of information about this topic are Berg's (1984) historical analysis, *A Missionary Chronicle: Being a History of the Ministry to the Deaf in the Episcopal Church, 1850–1980*, and Schein's article (1986) *Some Demographic Aspects of Religion and Deafness*. Two other, more recent, texts, offer interesting intersectional analyses, one historical (Cleall, de Groot, & Morgan, 2014) and the other contemporary (Monaghan, 1991). Cleall provides an analysis of religion and disability in nineteenth century England and Ireland. She traces the Church's involvement in obscuring the construction of deafness as a moral problem with "healing/helping" narratives that ultimately permitted the Church to carry out purging rituals and social containment under the guise of "benevolent" charitable practices like daily spiritual service and boarding schools. According to Monaghan (1991) Deafness and religiosity, on their own, are strong sources of self-identification possibly leading to an assumption that one might dominate the other or that the two cannot co-exist meaningfully. She explores these ideas in her ethnographic study of two Deaf churches, finding that Deaf and Christian culture, for church members, compliment and reinforce one another in substantive ways. For instance, certain important Deaf and Christian practices are pulled together

to bridge cultural gaps (e.g., the use of sign to spread the word of God and strengthen Deaf religious solidarity). Other practices like recruitment, mentorship and integration are characteristic of both Deaf and religious culture already, thus reinforce one another. Finally, worth mentioning here is the anthropological research done in India by Friedner (2014) on the role of the church in deaf communities in Bangalore.

Although not sociology, the historian Hannah Joyner wrote, *From Pity to Pride: Growing Up Deaf in the Old South* (2004), which is a historical narrative that addresses the social intersections of deafness, class, and race in mid-century antebellum south. It examines a group of wealthy, white men whose deafness was a source of oppression during a time when paternalism and privilege prevented the self-determination of many people, including deaf men whose marginalization became a catalyst for their involvement in an early Deaf cultural movement within the United States. A second notable text on the topic, which is also not sociology but sociolinguistics, is *The Hidden Treasure of Black ASL* (McCaskill et al., 2011), which traces the history and institutional structure of black residential schools in the south that produced separate forms of ASL in the United States. We mention both of these here because we had trouble finding sociological analyses that focused on race and deafness and determined that these would be useful for future intersectional, sociological analysis.

Barnartt (1997, 1982), interrogated the intersections among deafness, class, and gender. Barnartt's research (1997) used data taken from the 1972 National Census of the Deaf Population (NCDP), 1991 National Health Survey (NHIS) in order to highlight gender disparities within the Deaf community. In *Deaf women: Educational Experiences and Self-Identity*, Souza (2008), also examined the intersection of deafness and gender and using grounded theory and Goffman's work on identity and impression management to explore how Deaf women experience their educational lives as Deaf identifiers, and how, within the context of integrated university settings, they managed biculturality as Deaf identifiers in hearing-dominant environments. Souza (2010a) examined the intersections of gender, mothering, college attainment and Deaf identity with a particular interest in how knowledge and culture construct forms of "maternal thinking" that then inform practices of mothering as identity work. In a second article, Souza (2010b) examined how meanings of work, gender and deafness converge in workplace environments, often sites of resistance, where people might be more empowered to contest stereotypes.

Theme Five: Science, Technology, and Deafness

This is a small subsection of the literature, but an emerging area of inquiry in sociological investigations of deafness in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Research in the subfields of the sociology of science and medical sociology often examines the role of science, medicine and technology in producing social meanings and phenomenon. There are a few notable publications of this kind of work in science and technology studies (STS), the interdisciplinary field in which these sociological analyses of the co-construction of society and technologies can be categorized, that specifically address how medical discourse, medical technologies, and scientific knowledge work to produce deafness. Thus, we wanted to include them in this literature review to show how more recent sociological work is using science, technology and medicine, but especially the ways in which this is extending some the same arguments from that earlier sociological scholarship outlined in detail in the second theme of the literature.

Key sociological texts in this area largely have to do with the emerging technology of cochlear implants (CIs) in the latter part of the twentieth century. This is framed as a key technological development that is currently shaping the ways in which deafness is socially understood and responded to today. As this technology emerged, earlier arguments over the social meaning of deafness that we have reviewed in previous themes above were rearticulated in new ways. Blume's work has traced and catalogued this over a number of decades (Blume, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2010). In particular, his first article on the subject (Blume, 1997) mapped the controversy over CIs and the competing rhetoric over the device. His later book, *The Artificial Ear: Cochlear implants and the culture of deafness* (2010) was the first book-length examination of the people and systems involved in the development of the CI – although largely in Europe where he is based – and the consequences of this technology for deaf persons. Others have also examined the discourse used to frame deafness and CIs, including Smith and Campbell (1997) and Campbell (2009). Campbell (2005) looks at the ways in which this influences the selling of the CI to parents of deaf children. Mauldin examines the way CIs change the organization of deaf education, how hearing parents are socialized into caring for their newly diagnosed deaf child, and how neuroscientific discourse is used to produce new constructions of deafness based on the brain due to the fact that the CI is a neuroprosthetic (2011, 2012, 2014, 2016). These studies in STS and the sociology of deafness are also in dialogue with anthropology (Fjord, 1999, 2001, 2010), as well as works that examine how new technologies

change the very conceptualizations of deafness and sound in the first place (Friedner & Helmreich, 2012), and historical analyses of technology and deafness (Mills, 2011, 2012). There has also been much work in Deaf studies on this topic, especially scholarly work that grapples with the ethics and implications of cochlear implants, as well as genetic testing and deafness (Archbold, 2006; Christiansen & Leigh, 2002, 2004, 2010; Crouch, 1997; Gonsoulin, 2001; Hintermair & Albertini, 2005; Horejes & Heuer, 2013; Humphries et al., 2014; Johnson, 2006, 2005; Kermit, 2012; Lee, 2012; Paludneviciene & Leigh, 2011; Sparrow, 2005; Tucker, 1997, 1998; Valente, Bahan, & Bauman, 2011).

Theme Six: Researching Deaf People and Communities

A final, small subset of the literature consists of work that addresses the complex relationship between hearing researchers and d/Deaf persons or communities. This kind of consciousness about identity and privilege speaks to both the evolving sociological perspective on deafness, as well as the reflexive turn in the discipline of sociology that corresponds with the rising legitimacy of ethnographic and other qualitative methods. As social constructionists and feminist theorists dismantled objectivity, the embodiment of the researcher and their position became important as well and this is reflected in key texts that we've identified here as sociological literature that addresses the politics of researching deaf populations, as well as logistical challenges with traditional data collection methods.

Harris (1995) provides a reflexive account of a three-tiered piece of research that explores how Deaf people, in different contexts and under different conditions, use their cultural affiliation and distinctions to subvert mainstream stereotypes and preconceptions. Harris engages in a reflexive analysis; she begins by situating her own position as a hearing person learning British Sign Language (BSL) alongside other hearing signers who are conducting a participant observation in a mental health unit for Deaf people and interviewing members of a national Deaf organization. She attends to general issues concerning the role and status of the researcher in situ as well as more context-specific affects like problems of enculturation, finding that even when fluent or near-fluent in sign language, hearing persons' are still kept outside of the Deaf world and the researcher's intentions are questioned. In another text, Young and Ackerman (2001) have emphasized the value of reflexivity in saying that it can be a source of research validity in Deaf research and Deaf/hearing co-research. Their study explored Deaf

and hearing professional relationships in health and educational service environments where Deaf cultural identity was recognized and bilingualism (BSL and English) was used. Epistemology and ontology, they remind readers, are shaped not only by the objectives and aims of research but also by the researcher's identity and social or political views, which are always present and ongoing. Along those lines, Foster (1993) wrote on the dynamics of conducting research on deaf communities as a hearing researcher. These methodological issues were also explored in a conference paper by presented by Padden and Markowicz in 1975.

We would like to note that a major barrier to producing research on deaf persons is that sociologists who are not deaf or do not use sign language face language barriers in accessing d/Deaf communities or do not conduct research accessible to those who use sign language. For example, Jones and Pullen (1992) argue that past Deaf social research has largely relied on auditory-centered methods of data collection, missing a valuable opportunity to thoroughly explore the field of Deaf studies and engage Deaf persons, researchers included, in their own words. This was the inspiration for their longitudinal study, carried out within Deaf communities, that uses video to record interviews with participants and record communication between themselves (Jones is hearing and Pullen is Deaf). Dialogue forms, with a specific focus on variant responses to cultural differences and breakdowns in communication, are the object of cross-cultural analysis. Their study shows how being inclusive of Deaf communication practices in research that concerns Deaf persons' is a legitimizing gesture that can help balance power asymmetries between minority groups and social researchers. In addition to achieving this, Jones and Pullen also illustrate the pure practicality of using video in Deaf studies research to get around functional communication barriers and mitigate questions regarding data reliability in bilingual research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main goals of this paper were to show the length of time over which deafness, d/Deaf persons, and communities have been investigated sociologically, the range of themes that appear in the scholarship on deafness, and how and to what extent conceptualizations of deafness and d/Deaf communities changed over time. We found that while deafness has played a part in sociological scholarship since the early days of the discipline, there has been a shift over time from research on deafness an individual, pathological

problem to research on the social construction of deafness. Some of the first sociological musings about deafness we found were as long ago as the nineteenth century. These texts tended to consider the effects of being deaf on an individual and what that might be like in a modern society. They also tended to use deafness as a vehicle for thinking about how a "normal" individual would behave in or interact with modern society. In this since, deafness itself was not being studied. Instead, it was used as a conceptual tool to illustrate and contemplate social pathology. There was no ethnographic or empirical inquiries into the actual experiences of deaf persons as a population at this time, although Martineau, herself a deaf sociologist, wrote of her experiences and directed her writing to other deaf persons.

We contend that the shift from the theme of "deafness as a problem" to the theme of "constructing deafness" has been the most powerful change in the academic literature on deafness across the decades. The theme of "constructing deafness" was both reflected in the highest number studies and identified across the largest period of time of all of the themes we identified in our review. Furthermore, scholarly work on this theme is very much reflected the identity politics of deafness and in the now standard practice of distinguishing between the audiological status of "deaf" and the cultural identity of "Deaf." All of this speaks to the importance of pioneering scholarship that pointed to the power of constructionism as a theoretical approach, and the instability of deafness across social milieu. Scholarship related to this theme suggests that deafness, the deaf body, and the Deaf identity are all highly contingent and socially and historically situated.

Our review calls attention to the underappreciated and underutilized early sociological work that laid the groundwork for the important shift in thinking about deafness by analyzing deafness through a sociological lens. Indeed the literature in the themes of "deafness and social institutions" and "deafness and intersectionality" elaborated on this prior scholarship by delving further into the experiences of d/Deaf persons. What emerged over time was a rise in the number of empirical studies about these experiences – a body of sociological inquiry has built up over time that goes beyond the anecdotal, theoretical, and/or purely discursive realms to an exploration of the experiences of d/Deaf persons in interactions. By tracing the history of how literature on the sociology of deafness unfolded, we can see that this was predicated by the fundamental shift that appeared in the groundbreaking work of a variety of scholars we mentioned in theme two – for example, Foster, Christiansen, Barnartt, and Meadow – that came before.

Research related to the theme "deafness and intersectionality" reveals a continuing need to address the complexities and variations within the

d/Deaf population through empirical work as well. In particular, findings of studies on the theme of "deafness and intersectionality" suggest that d/Deaf people can identify in various ways because their experiences are produced by a combination of their bodily status, their community membership(s) or other cultural markers, and the larger society within which they are located. Thus, while some of the literature in "constructions of deafness" focuses on the existence of a Deaf cultural identity (and at times polices the bounds of it), other studies that address intersectionality take a more nuanced approach to what it means to be d/Deaf. Looking at the group of themes as a whole, suggests that, over time, the literature on deafness has moved along a continuum from the individual/pathological, through consideration of the ways in which deafness is socially constructed (and the emergence of Deaf identity/community), to the more recent consideration of the various ways to be Deaf and to experience deafness.

Although the largest number of texts we found fit into the "constructing deafness" theme and addressed the legitimacy of Deaf identity and Deaf culture, some more recent trends in the literature and the latter themes we identified seem to indicate that we might be moving from identity politics and identity-based studies to more empirical studies that examine the interactions between discourse, knowledge, and social institutions on deaf persons. Much like the early sociological scholarship that demonstrated the possibilities for empirical studies of deaf experience, recent work on themes like "deafness and social institutions," "science, technology and deafness," and "researching deaf people and communities" is geared toward the empirical. However, many areas of research that confront questions of intersectionality, such as work that explores deafness and Deaf identity and culture in relation to race, queerness, and other categories of "other," are under-researched and empirical work in these areas is needed.

This review has demonstrated the narrative arc that sociological scholarship on deafness has taken, as well as how this body of scholarship fits into larger shifts within the discipline of sociology itself (e.g., a move toward constructionism, identity studies, and the emphasis on reflexivity in research).

The groundbreaking research in the latter half of the twentieth century was much needed in a time when deafness had not ever been considered as anything other than a medical problem and had rarely been theorized or researched from a sociological viewpoint. Despite the advances noted in this review, much of the literature, although not all, is still riding the mid-1990s renaissance of identity research. Our review suggests several directions for future research. Commonalities in the political, social, and economic marginalization of d/Deaf and/or disabled persons should be further

interrogated and critiqued. We hope that the inclusion of this paper in this volume of RSSD will encourage readers to undertake such research. Additionally, as we have shown above, there is a dearth of research on race, class, gender and deafness. The intersectionality of race and deafness is particularly under theorized and under-researched. Multiply marginalized groups deserve more attention and we call on scholars who studying deafness and Deaf people to include intersectional approaches in their analyses. Research using narrative methodologies to understand personal experience would be an excellent place to start, as well as collaborations in other "area studies" such as women's studies, critical race studies and queer studies.

Empirical work on the mechanisms by which deaf persons and the Deaf community are disenfranchised in larger social systems and institutions is also needed. Key insights from scholarship on the theme of "constructing deafness" should be revisited for issues related to deafness that are ripe for further investigation, elaboration, and discussion. We could not find sociological studies that address deafness and mental health (although there is the *International Journal of Mental Health and Deafness*, it is far more medical than sociological). But the marginalization of deafness and mental health in sociology reflects not just the lack of research on d/Deaf issues in sociology but also the marginalization of mental health issues or psychiatric disabilities in disability studies. Sociological investigation of intersectional marginalization in other institutions such as the prison system and education is also called for.

This leads us to another important area of research that is needed: the experiences of d/Deaf persons within the healthcare system. Medical sociology is one of the largest sections of the American Sociological Association, healthcare is one of the fastest growing sectors of our economy, and sociologists have long argued that more and more aspects of life are being understood through medical frameworks (Conrad, 1992, 2007; Zola, 1972). As we saw in the "science, technology and deafness" theme, sociological analysis that attempts to understand how deafness is constructed today is turning more toward scientific knowledge and technological artifact, as STS scholars have shown that society is co-produced by social and technical systems. Thus, researching the intersection between deafness and medicine should be high on our research agenda. Research on deafness and use of technologies that are not necessarily medical, technologies such as captioning, is needed. Some starting points for this kind of research can be found in the literature we cited above, as well as through the University of Rochester Center for Deaf Health Research[4] and Gallaudet University's Center for Visual Language and Visual Learning.[5] Despite considerable

research across decades, deafness remains an under-researched area of sociological inquiry. Many fruitful avenues of future research are suggested by this review.

NOTES

1. It should be noted here that others were writing during this time period about deafness inform other disciplines, namely the sciences and education (Adler, 1865; Arms, 1887; Bell, 1890; Kitto, 1852; Scott, 1870). Some overviews of these debates and historical accounts of writing on deafness can be found elsewhere, such as Baynton (1998), Branson and Miller (2002).
2. At the same time, scholar Tom Humphries was writing about the term "audism" in a 1975 unpublished manuscript (Bauman, 2008, p. 13), and the term "Deaf" (in place of deaf) was being widely adopted in some circles.
3. It should be noted that the report by Lunde and Bigman (1959) was one of the earliest large-scale sociological studies we found. It was undertaken by Lunde and Bigman, both faculty in the sociology department at Gallaudet at the time, and full of extremely detailed quantitative data from a national study of deaf persons' occupations and occupational context.
4. Their website is found here: http://www.urmc.rochester.edu/ncdhr/index.cfm
5. Their website is found here: http://vl2.gallaudet.edu/

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