



# 'It feels like being Deaf is normal': an exploration into the complexities of defining D/deafness and young D/deaf people's identities

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*In this article we examine the ways in which young D/deaf British people express and experience their identities and how their D/deafness intersects with other self-identifications. We examine the controversial debates within D/deaf communities, cultures and studies about D/deafness as disability versus D/deafness as linguistic minority. We explore the ways in which 'Deaf' and 'deaf' definitions and identities contradict, overlap, coexist and compete. At the same time we discuss the problems with binary constructions of deaf/hearing or Deaf/deaf for capturing the full experiences of young D/deaf people's lives. We consider the reasons why there is such a dearth of research within the social sciences which focuses on young D/deaf people's lives and discuss the complexities of conducting this type of research. Young D/deaf people's articulations of identities and cultural experiences are presented. We conclude with suggestions for researchers and also with a hope that the current D/deaf challenges towards the hearing world and deaf challenges within the Deaf world may bring future possibilities and opportunities for D/deaf young people in the U.K.*

*Dans cet article, nous étudierons comment les jeunes malentendants britanniques expriment et ressentent leurs identités et comment leur S/surdité coexiste avec leurs autres identifications. Nous examinerons les points qui font débat au sein des communautés de personnes S/sourdes, leur culture et comparerons les études sur la S/surdité en tant qu'handicap à celles sur la S/surdité en tant que minorité linguistique. Nous analyserons en quoi les définitions de la S/surdité et les identités entrent en conflit, se chevauchent, coexistent et rivalisent. En même temps, nous discuterons des problèmes concernant les constructions binaires telles que sourd/entendant ou Sourd/sourd utilisées pour rendre compte des expériences de la vie de jeunes S/sourds. Nous considérerons les raisons pour lesquelles il y a, dans le domaine des sciences humaines, si peu de recherches portant sur la vie des jeunes S/sourds et discuterons des difficultés inhérentes à ce type de recherche. Les articulations de l'identité ainsi que les expériences culturelles de jeunes S/sourds seront présentées. Nous conclurons par des suggestions aux chercheurs en espérant que les défis à relever, aussi bien à l'égard du monde entendant qu'au sein même des communautés de S/sourds, puissent ouvrir de nouvelles perspectives et contribuer à l'amélioration de la vie des jeunes S/sourds au Royaume-Uni.*

## Introduction

In this article we discuss the tensions between the definitions and meanings of Deafness/deafness and disability. We consider the significant academic discourses about the construction of Deafness/deafness. There follows a section in which we examine some of the methodological implications of working with D/deaf people.<sup>1</sup> The final part of the discussion draws upon young D/deaf people's articulations of their identities and their social and cultural experiences in the U.K.<sup>2</sup>

Our research with D/deaf people highlighted the importance of transforming representations of impaired persons' identities, lives and geographies as 'homogenous' which are often found in some parts of disability studies and geography (consider similar calls from Chouinard 1997, 383; Dear *et al.* 1997; Parr and Butler 1999, 10). What our work with young D/deaf people shows is that 'being D/deaf' in contemporary Britain is an extremely complex and contested experience. It provides a very clear example of the fluidity and dynamism of social identities, especially when this is viewed in the context of the disabled/abled binary. What this article examines are the ways in which young D/deaf people do not fit into such a binary but instead are bound up with other binaries, Deaf/deaf and D/deaf/hearing. However, what is clear below is that even these binaries are problematic. D/deaf young people are able to articulate and live out their identities in empowered and resistive ways. They do not seem as constrained by the binaries as some parts of disability or D/deaf studies are.

Our Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) project explored the ways in which three groups of young people aged 16–25 experienced social exclusion and inclusion through processes of marginalisation and resistance within a range of

socio-spatial institutions: home, family, school, college/university, workplace, community. For the qualitative research, which formed the main element of the project, three groups were interviewed: young lesbians and gay men, D/deaf youth and D/deaf lesbian and gay young people (15, 15 and 5 people in each group respectively). The project also conducted 39 retrospective interviews with people in each of these groupings who are older than 25. Twenty-nine people representing a range of professional personnel working with the groups of young people were interviewed.

This article specifically draws upon the 20 interviews conducted with D/deaf young people, 15 who were identified as heterosexual and five as lesbian or gay. The young people were differentiated in a range of ways. They were drawn from a wide range of social backgrounds in terms of their parents' social class, educational qualifications, household structures and employment status. Two interviewees had D/deaf parents or siblings; all the others had hearing parents, siblings and relatives. The respondents were differentiated in terms of the means of communication they used, both generally and for the interviews: three of them used oral communication methods (lip reading and speech), one interviewee used a mixture of Sign Supported English (SSE) and British Sign Language (BSL) and the rest used BSL only. The interviews of the latter were all conducted with the use of an interpreter (for a fuller discussion of this, see below). The group of 20 consisted of 14 young women and 6 young men (more young women 'opted into' the research than young men (Skelton 2001a). In terms of ethnicity one interviewee was of Caribbean descent, another a British-Indian Sikh, another a British-Pakistani Muslim, one person was Irish and another Russian. These interviewees had learned the sign language of their countries and so BSL was their second language in sign. The remaining interviewees were all British and white.

This piece draws upon the specific case study material relating to young D/deaf people's identities. Other articles we have published explore different aspects of the D/deaf research, the issues relating to lesbian and gay identities, and analysis of the similarities and differences between the two key groups (see Skelton and Valentine 2002; Valentine, Butler and Skelton 2001; Valentine and Skelton 2003; Valentine, Skelton and Butler 2002; Valentine, Skelton and Butler 2003).

1 We realise that this way of writing the term 'D/deaf' is rather unusual. It is a form we have decided upon for particular reasons based on our research with young people and D/deaf people older than 25. Our explanation of this way of writing the term is examined in detail below.

2 This article draws on a research project, 'Living on the Edge: Understanding the Marginalisation and Resistance of Vulnerable Youth' funded by the Economic and Social Research Council project (award no. L134 2 1032). Ruth Butler was involved in the project through her quantitative analysis of 1,177 questionnaires completed by school children and college students aged 16 to 18.

## The Uneasy Positioning of D/deafness as Part of Disability

This article is appearing in a special issue on disability and geography so it is important to examine the complex relationship that exists between those who identify, and/or are identified, as D/deaf and those who identify, and/or are identified, as disabled.<sup>3</sup> It should not be assumed that D/deafness and disability are synonymous. Both these categories are highly complex and far from homogenous (cf. Barnes and Mercer 1996; Corker 1996, 1998, 2001; Gregory *et al.* 1995; Ladd 1992). Indeed, there is an important discourse within Deaf Culture<sup>4</sup> that being Deaf is not to be disabled but rather to be part of a linguistic minority. Some of our participants in the research project would be concerned that an article on D/deafness is appearing within a context of discussion about disability because part of their cultural identity is to affirm being Deaf and to reject the notion of being disabled. When asked if they considered being Deaf as being disabled, a significant number said 'no' very firmly but they recognised that it was about difference, about a difference between hearing and D/deaf worlds (cf. Lane 1995). As leading U.S. D/deaf activist, teacher and scholar M. J. Bienvenu has stated 'We are proud of our language, culture and heritage. Disabled we are not!' (1989, 13).

3 It would of course be important to consider these distinctions in any discussion, but it seems even more pertinent given the siting of this particular article.

4 There is a vibrant and complex debate about what constitutes Deaf culture and a Deaf community, whether these exist or not, how they can be defined, what role they play and so forth. These terms are contested and form a significant part of the research and writing about D/deafness and also are hotly debated by D/deaf people themselves. The complexities of the discussion about culture and community are beyond the scope of this discussion. Collections of essays about defining culture and community can be found in Susan Gregory and Gillian Hartley's edited collection (1991) *Constructing Deafness*, Ila Parasnis's edited collection *Cultural and Language Diversity and the Deaf Experience*, Kyle and Woll's book *Sign Language: the Study of Deaf People and their Language* and Wrigley's discourse *The Politics of Deafness*. Mairian Corker (1996, 1998, 2000, 2001a) also brings a sophisticated, philosophical contribution to the discourse about Deafness and deafness, and Deaf and deaf identities. There is also a range of Internet site discussion lists. For the purpose of this article we will presume the existence of a Deaf culture and something which constitutes a D/deaf community. Many of our respondents have discussed whether or not they feel themselves to be part of both or either.

However, there were young people who identified more as 'deaf' and who recognised that they had an impairment saying that they would like to be able to hear and/or to speak and be understood easily. To reflect this diversity (which we explore below, including the fact that self-identity and ascribed identity as Deaf or deaf can change over time and space) we decided that this article was appropriate for a disability and geography collection, alongside two other reasons. First, because there is very little research within geography about D/deafness.<sup>5</sup> Hence, placing this article within a collection about disability is part of a process of making D/deafness and D/deaf people (in this case young D/deaf people) more visible in the discipline. Second, the discourses about D/deafness and D/deaf culture and the tussles with disability politics, research and experiences are an important part of debates about disability. The role of D/deaf people within disability rights campaigns is a contentious one (see Corker 1998 for a sophisticated and detailed discussion).

Many D/deaf people are not sure where they fit: In a Deaf world? In an ableist but hearing world? In a disabled but hearing world? For people who place themselves firmly within Deaf culture then there is a definite rejection of the notion of impairment—'hearing impaired' is a detested term. They see themselves outside of the campaigns for disability rights and attempt instead to create an almost separatist culture that tries to stand outside the hearing world. Deaf culture is a source and site of campaigning for Deaf rights and acts as an extremely important source of support and information for Deaf people. However, deaf people with other impairments often have to fight hard to get their other needs met within Deaf communities. Also, unconditional support from the Deaf community 'is not readily extended to deaf people in transition . . . Deaf people must abide by the rule of the culture to benefit from its support' (Corker 1998, 28).

5 In two recent and important texts on geography and disability there is no discussion about D/deafness. In Butler and Parr's edited collection (1999) there is no mention of it at all, in Gleeson's book *Geographies of Disability* (1999) there are two mentions where reference is made to Davis (1995) and his work on the historical experiences of D/deaf people. This may be because geographers do not consider, like many D/deaf people, D/deafness to be a disability. However, there is no geographical work on D/deafness within social, cultural and feminist geography work either. It seems, therefore, to be a lacuna in geography.

Deaf culture, in its strongest form, can reject people it sees as accepting the biomedical model definition of 'deafness', that is people who identify as hearing impaired. It is extremely critical of cochlea implants and campaigns for them not to be carried out on children. Deaf people argue that this contravenes the child's right to choose about what happens to their own bodies and constructs D/deafness as an impairment to be cured, hence a type of attack on Deafness as a culture and Deaf people as a linguistic group. The Deaf community has in some cases, rejected deaf people, who have had these operations. For other people who identify as 'deaf' then there is recognition of having an impairment, of experiencing similar processes of discrimination and marginalisation as people with other disabilities. There is also a tension relating to the construction of a dominant discourse about Deaf people as a linguistic minority and the use of BSL (Corker 1998, 2000; Lane 1995).

[W]ell I have to be careful what I say about the Deaf community because of all the BSL versus oral debate, I know there's a lot of history about that, and a very old fashioned attitudes, I think the BSL have got a bit of a grudge about the oral users... I have to be careful because once they found out that I'm from a hearing family and that I've been brought up in an oral system, then basically I'm given a pretty hard time. (Eleanor, 22, employed,<sup>6</sup> oral communication interview)

For many D/deaf people finding the space within Deaf discourses and politics, and disability discourses and politics can be very difficult, they find themselves in a complex 'in-between' position. What was common in our research was for a young D/deaf student to state that they did not consider themselves disabled, yet later in an interview to acknowledge that they received help from the Disabled Student Support Grant. None of the students seemed to recognise the contradiction. However, it is about pragmatic choices as much as a question of asserting a particular identity. Until BSL is made an officially

recognised language then educational support is only available through the Disability Support system. Hence, D/deaf people are constructed as 'disabled' by political, economic and social practices. How they represent themselves has little meaning when they need support from the state in order to pursue their education and/or training goals.

In the next section we explore the specific complexity of identity facing D/deaf people within the U.K. (although debates and discourses around D/deafness from the U.S., especially Gallaudet University, have an influence on D/deaf studies here). This is therefore something that adds onto, or intersects with, the complicated debates about D/deafness and disability. In the remaining sections of the article we try to tease out what this 'in-betweenity' might mean in practice to young D/deaf people.

### **Definitions and Discourses: 'Deaf' or 'deaf', Disabled or Linguistic Minority?**

Let us first discuss the terminology we are using and the ways in which such terminology is written. In the literature, *Deaf* and *deaf* and *Deafness* and *deafness* are used to indicate and recognise that there are two dominant discourses around the construction, meanings, interpretation and processes at play in definitions and identities of deafness.<sup>7</sup> These discourses are taking place in both academic debates about D/deafness (which involve many D/deaf academics), within D/deaf communities and as part of D/deaf politics. There are of course significant overlaps and interconnections between the two. On the one hand, because of the D/deaf people involved in both worlds and, on the other, because of the academic research carried out with D/deaf people.

In some ways these discourses mirror the medical and social models of disability (Davis 1997a, b; Lane 1995; Parr and Butler 1999; Shakespeare 1993). The 'medical model' of deafness defines the deaf person as having an impairment when compared to their hearing, 'normal' peers. Deafness is tested and measured against 'normal'

6 Where young people used their voices in the interviews these were transcribed verbatim. This includes some of the grammatical errors (from a Standard English perspective) which are part of their speech patterns.

7 In fact there are several competing and interconnecting debates about definitions and meaning about D/deafness and being D/deaf. However this article explores the two dominant discourses which relate to the definitions. See Corker (2001).

hearing levels. The surgical development of cochlea implants is part of this development as it claims to provide a so-called 'cure' for the hearing impairment. The 'social model' of Deafness recognises that it is the hearing world that excludes Deaf people. The hearing world's lack of Deaf awareness and ability to communicate with Deaf people renders the latter at a significant disadvantage. Social problems experienced by D/deaf people are constructed in time and space (Lane 1995). Disability Rights Movements<sup>8</sup> have resulted in a revised construction of disability which shifts emphasis off the body (the medical model) and onto the ways in which people with impairments/disabilities face conditions which are socially disabling. It is important to recognise that the social model does not deny that D/deaf people have a bodily impairment. However, equally, we must stress that this impairment is compounded by exclusionary social attitudes, practices and the production of an environment in which not being able to hear becomes a disability. Constructions of D/deafness have varied significantly over time and space. For example in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, USA there were so many in the community who were D/deaf that it was not seen as a social problem; everyone 'spoke' sign language and D/deaf people were fully involved in all aspects of community life (Groce 1985). However, see Corker (2000, 458) for a useful critique of this example.

There are subtle differences in the use of the dual way of writing *Deaf* and *deaf* within academic and D/deaf discourses. It is important to note that while the convention of writing 'deaf' with a capital *or* a small case 'd' is currently common within D/deaf studies literature it doesn't always mean exactly the same thing. For example Carol Padden (in Gregory and Hartley [1991, 44]), a key author on D/deaf culture in the U.S. offers the following explanation:

I will use here a convention adopted by a number of researchers where the capitalized 'Deaf' is used

8 Such movements have been significant in both North America and the U.K., albeit much more recently in the latter. In the U.K., legislation is slowly beginning to ensure certain rights for people with disabilities. The most substantial is the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995. A section of this Act related to rights of equal access and experience of education came into practice only in 2002 and some components of the Special Education Needs Disability Act (SENDA) do not come into force until 2006.

when referring to cultural aspects, as in the culture of Deaf people. The lower case 'deaf', on the other hand, refers to non-cultural aspects such as at the audiological condition of deafness.

An influential author on D/deaf culture and identity in the U.K., Mairian Corker (1996, 7) explains how she uses the two styles of writing:

I use the term 'deaf' in the broadest possible context to refer to all people for whom being deaf is an important and sometimes dominant characteristic. It may include those Deaf people who are members of the Deaf community, those who are not, and those deaf people whose relationships with both Deaf and hearing communities are not clear. The generic use of the term is not intended in any way to deny or distort the cultural conceptualisation of Deafness and Deaf people, which will be referred to in upper case 'D' when it is appropriate.

There is therefore a broad consensus among D/deaf people and within D/deaf studies literature that 'Deaf' is linked to a social construction of identity, involvement with a Deaf community, a concept of Deaf culture and the use of BSL.<sup>9</sup> The writing of 'deaf' is used by some academics, many in the medical profession and certain deaf people, to imply a definition based on medical descriptions of deafness as measured against the 'norm' of hearing. It is used for people who: tend not to present a strong Deaf identity; do not use BSL as their first language; rely on oral styles of communication (lip-reading, speaking); and by deaf people who identify themselves as disabled. For this latter group, if they are involved in political action, it is more likely to be aligned with disability rights campaigning than more narrowly defined Deaf campaigns such as the current one for the official recognition of BSL.

The boundary between Deaf and deaf identities, meanings and construction can be fluid. At different times people may identify as Deaf or as deaf.

9 These are relational to hearing culture and to other impaired identities (Corker 1998). Hence Deaf and Deafness is defined as part of the Deaf/hearing binary. As Deaf culture does not accept that Deafness is an impairment their sense of community, culture and language is defined against those of the hearing world. However, it can also be defined as a binary or duality with deafness because of Deaf culture's rejection of deaf identification with disability and impairment.

In different spaces people may be ascribed an identity as Deaf or as deaf. Someone might perceive themselves as Deaf and at their local Deaf club where they feel part of Deaf culture and use BSL, their first language, they are likely to be recognised as this. However, while they might self-identify as Deaf, for the same person in their place of work, if they have to use oral styles of communication within a hearing context, then their work colleagues might ascribe them a deaf identity. In such a setting there is no Deaf culture only hearing culture, and using BSL is usually impossible. Young people we interviewed for the research project were negotiating between both types of identity, indeed some were in the process of shifting from a deaf self-identity to one more associated with Deaf culture, and this was particularly linked to the learning of BSL. The introduction to this visual language was seen as a significant change in their communication practices and for many opened up the Deaf world for them to enter and become a part of.

To reflect this fluidity of identity, and to render this discussion inclusive of the different identities and positionalities articulated by research participants, we have developed the writing of D/deaf in a dual form. This provides a context of equivalence of meaning and importance for both definitions of D/deafness. It also recognises and captures the tensions and differences in identities claimed by the young people involved in the project. Where we use just one or the other this is because there is an explicit meaning of Deaf or deaf. This is also about a political choice to try and counter *hearingist* constructions of deafness, which could be aligned to ableist discourses (see Chouniard 1997), solely as impairment. We want to make the politics and challenges of Deaf identity visible throughout.

An important part of the construction of Deafness is where being Deaf means being part of a linguistic minority. For Deaf people who use BSL as their first or elective language their life revolves around visual means of interaction, which include a vision-centred language, communicative practices and ways of thinking and knowing. Some of the young people in the interviews raised in hearing families and who had gone to oral schools but later encountered BSL, talked about the power of *seeing* people talking, *watching* people signing and feeling that this was part of them, part of

their culture.<sup>10</sup> For these young people the shift to a visual system of communication rather than one based on hearing (even though they could not hear) felt empowering because it came easily and allowed them to connect with other D/deaf people. The oralist methods these youngsters had grown up with denied them the freedom to communicate with others who were D/deaf; oralism is about communicating with hearing people. However, there is an intricacy of power within this. The emphasis on the visual has consequences in effectively excluding those who cannot see, including deaf-blind people. Vision is therefore privileged. A Deaf-defined construction can, therefore, be construed as carrying its own form of exclusion. The complex difficulties faced by blind/visually-impaired deaf people were not a focus of our particular study. Nevertheless, it highlights the complexities of trying to discuss elements of Deaf culture which define it as different from that of hearing people at the same time as trying to acknowledge the internal contradictions and even exclusionary practices that might exist as part of Deaf culture.

In the excerpt below, Sophie, who went deaf when she was five, talks about her joy at being with other Deaf children who signed when she went to secondary school. From the age of five to eleven she had been to schools with a special unit for deaf children which followed an oralist pedagogy where children were not allowed to sign. This was a system of partial integration into mainstream education. At the secondary school level she chose to follow a segregated education path and went to a signing school for the Deaf.

I decided when I was eleven... I had the choice and I decided to come to the school for the Deaf... and that was just AMAZING! It was absolutely brilliant, suddenly I was just with everyone signing, people signing, telling stories, lots of jokes, making good friends really quickly and it was really good. The

10 Oral schools are those which follow the oralist philosophy (called 'audist' in the U.S.) and place an emphasis on speech. Young people who attend such schools report being told continually to 'turn on your voice', receiving speech therapy to encourage appropriate use of pitch and tone of voice and being taught lip-reading for understanding. Sign language was strongly discouraged. Young people report that they were disciplined for signing and their parents were told not to learn signing but to insist that their child speak all the time.

teachers, they could sign so that was really excellent and I just fitted in I just felt really happy about it because I was signing, you know, and I was learning a new language. Every time I would go to anything I'd learn new words and it was really good I really enjoyed it—it was good to be in a Deaf school. (Sophie, 17, college student, BSL interview)

Sophie suddenly felt part of the school environment, not excluded from it as she was in hearing schools. She felt the same as others, included and an equal participant among her peer group. She was also able to meet many more Deaf people rather than the few (between 6 and 10) that she had spent her earlier education years with.

Sean went through an oral education system and was taught to lip read and to use his voice to communicate. At the age of 17 he chose to leave home and attend a college for D/deaf people in the Midlands. He actively chose somewhere where there were only D/deaf students and to be in an environment that was totally set up for D/deaf people. There, BSL was the main language, inside and outside of classes, and he had to learn it. In this discussion about BSL he emphasises the visual aspect of sign language and the expressiveness of Deaf communication. Sean is pragmatic though because he acknowledges that his oral training will be valuable in his future choices. Sean is therefore expressing a realisation and appreciation of the value of both types of training. Sean is an example of a hybrid and dynamic identity that some young D/deaf people are able to articulate if they have been able to cope and learn in both the hearing oralist education system and in the Deaf communication system. Sean is one of the young D/deaf people who straddle and challenge the binaries between hearing/Deaf and Deaf/deaf.

I just think sign language means you've got more facial expression. I mean in the oral system you're just relying on the mouth pattern, it's boring, [in BSL] you get much more body movement, it's much more dramatic. You get the facial expression plus mouth patterns plus the signs, I think it's fantastic. I think it's much easier because you get a much larger amount of information in a small amount of sign language but I also think that the oral system has been useful for me in terms of getting a job in the future. To be honest when I first came into the signing environment I struggled trying to understand

and then gradually picked up more from my friends until I'd say in about two months I was signing fluently with absolutely no problems whatsoever. (Sean, aged 23, college student, BSL interview)

Sean describes himself as bilingual and values the oral skills he acquired because it means he can communicate with his family. Only Sean's brother learned any degree of sign language when they were children, but his parents have recently begun to do BSL Stage 1, encouraged by their son's growing use of BSL and his movement out of the oral education system which actively discourages hearing families to develop signing skills.<sup>11</sup>

### Young D/deaf People—Missing from the Literature?

Just as geographers have paid relatively little attention to the experiences of D/deaf people and disabled people in general, Deaf studies scholars have conducted relatively little research about the lives of young D/deaf people. For a notable exception to this see Corker's work (1999 [referenced under Priestly], 2000, 2001a, b). Her work focuses upon aspects of disability and includes research with deaf young people aged 11 to 16, which was conducted as part of an ESRC project with young people with a wide range of impairments and experiences of disability. Young people, with the exception of sociology and cultural studies, have been a neglected group within most academic disciplines, although there is a rapidly growing body of work within geography (for example, Aitken 2001; Holloway and Valentine 2000; Skelton and Valentine 1998). In the *American Annals of the Deaf*, an academic journal dedicated to research about and with D/deaf people, there are a few papers which focus exclusively on young D/deaf people. These usually are based on studies that use quantitative methods to compare D/deaf youth with their hearing peers. The research that has been conducted explores such themes as self-esteem

11 There are highly complex communication relationships within families with hearing and D/deaf members. Ninety-five percent of D/deaf children are born to hearing parents and the majority are the only D/deaf person in their family. The ways in which this impacts on family/household relations is beyond the scope of this paper but see Skelton and Valentine (2002).

(Yachnik 1986), boredom and depression (Watt and Davis 1991) and social or training experiences in school (Mertens 1989; Bull and Bullis 1991). Very few of these U.S.-based studies examine how D/deafness influences young people's social, cultural and political attitudes and identities nor do they focus on their experiences of growing up D/deaf<sup>12</sup> and how these have influenced their aspirations and plans for the future. Nor have these studies examined their participation (or exclusion) from key social institutions in local communities and spaces of life such as the family, home, school, college, the workplace and social organisations such as the Deaf Club.<sup>13</sup>

In the U.K., an important exception to this lacuna of research with young Deaf people is Susan Gregory, Juliet Bishop and Lesley Sheldon's *Deaf Young People and their Families* (1995). This is an exceptional text based on a longitudinal follow-up study to *Deaf Children and their Families*.<sup>14</sup> Eighteen years after the first research project, which documented parents of D/deaf children's experiences, opinions and reflections, 75% of the families were traced and both the young people and their parents agreed to participate in follow-up interviews. The interviews focused on the young

people's experiences of, and commentaries about, family life, education, paid employment, living in a hearing world, their relationships and 'being deaf'. This is the only longitudinal study that has focused on D/deaf children and young people.

Findings from our own research with young people in Britain echo much of what the young people in Gregory *et al.*'s and Corker's studies express. Our project, in contrast to Gregory *et al.*, had a specific focus on the young people themselves as they narrated their lives. We did not interview any parents. The young D/deaf people in our project were interviewed as autonomous social actors—a political, ethical and pragmatic decision on our part. We were also explicit in our emphasis on the processes of marginalisation and resistance that were articulated by the young people. The processes that emerged included bullying by hearing peers, neglect by hearing teachers, denial of an effective system of communication among themselves as D/deaf children, participation in a Deaf-centred social world, and a range of resistive (disobedient) behaviour. We explored the significance of key social spaces to processes of young people's identity formation. In addition our work with young D/deaf lesbians and gay men is an extremely innovative element within geography, D/deaf studies and sexuality studies.

## Methodological Tensions and Dilemmas of Recording the Visual

Our research project combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. The former to capture the depth and richness of young people's experiences and the latter to place some of those experiences within a wider perspective of young people's responses to a structured questionnaire. With a focus on D/deafness and gay sexualities, we were exploring two aspects of young people's geographies, experiences and identities which are currently neglected.

Deaf communities are relatively small numerically and are described as being 'tight-knit' and a 'small world'. In the U.K. many D/deaf young people who have been through one of the few schools or colleges for Deaf people at some point in their lives continue friendships made in such places across a wide geography. It is not uncommon for large groups of young D/deaf people to travel long distances at the weekend to attend a party or some

12 Quite a lot of research with D/deaf people does include a discussion of their times at school, their first job and so forth however much of this is in a retrospective context rather than being conducted with young D/deaf people when they are actually living the experiences. This means that young D/deaf people's voices are silenced in the literature, their 'voices' about the experiences as they are lived are not recorded. This project provides a step towards addressing this elision within geography.

13 Deaf Clubs exist in almost every country, in particular in North America and Europe. In the U.K. many clubs were founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, often with endowments from philanthropists and many were connected with religious groups. Currently Deaf Clubs are usually established as charities and may share premises with Deaf Societies. The latter often have an educational, social and political role working to increase Deaf awareness within the hearing community, provide a range of services for D/deaf people and be advocates for D/deaf people. Societies often employ both hearing and D/deaf people; Deaf Clubs usually involve only D/deaf people as employees or as volunteers. The Deaf Club provides the social space and community base for many D/deaf people and organises events for elderly and young D/deaf people.

14 This title was used for the re-publication in 1995 of the 1976 text *The Deaf Child and His Family*. Such gendered language around research and education with children was not unusual. In the U.K. throughout the 1970s and 1980s the National Deaf Children's Society produced car rear-window stickers which read 'Mind That Child, He May Be Deaf!'

kind of D/deaf event. Hence the interconnections between, and knowledges of, D/deaf young people can be very strong. Therefore, the preservation of privacy and confidentiality was a key concern for the researchers, the participants and the interpreters (where present). To this end the specific places, cities and towns, where we interviewed people are generalised to 'the Midlands'. The actual titles of institutions have not been used, and people's names have all been changed. We do however accurately state interviewees' ages and employment/student status.

In this article we draw solely upon the qualitative research with D/deaf people because none of the questionnaire respondents identified as D/deaf. The semi-structured interactive interviews with young D/deaf people each lasted between one and two hours. Seventeen of the 20 interviews involved an interpreter and interviews were conducted using BSL or Sign-Supported English (SSE), depending on the preference and signing competence of the young person. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and anonymised. As researchers, we studied BSL at Stage 1. This provided us with basic skills sufficient to arrange interview dates and times but it was not enough to be able to understand the full depth of language used by interviewees nor to ask the complex range of interview questions. To learn BSL to a level required for proficient communication with D/deaf people using this language takes a minimum of three years training (if studying full time). Hence we were reliant on interpreters for the majority of our work with D/deaf people. The interpreters who worked with us within the project needed to be people both we, and the interviewees, could trust (see below).

BSL is a visual language which means complex ethical and practical issues arise in terms of methods researchers use to communicate with D/deaf people participating in a study. In an ideal methodology, sometimes used within D/deaf studies, the D/deaf interviewees would have been videoed in order to capture the depth and intensity of the expressiveness of BSL, and to provide a visual representation of the discussions. When participants talked about very positive or negative experiences, for example of their childhoods, their whole body expressed how they felt about it. The anger, surprise, sadness, frustration, happiness people expressed was clearly visible as part

of the signs they used.<sup>15</sup> However, written representation of the visual recording of the interviews is not very easy to achieve, although there are conventions for writing sign language and much research in Deaf Studies makes use of diagrams and photographs (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1998). Nevertheless although interpreting a visual language into a spoken one is bound to lose some of the complexities, emotions and meanings of the BSL, we decided against videoing the interviews. There were several reasons for this. There was the problem of anonymity, disguising a person's face loses the quality of the expression. Many of the young people we interviewed were clearly relieved that we were not going to video them for the interview. Technically it would have been very difficult to achieve and very time consuming. People were already donating much of their own time to our project. Finally, as researchers not fully qualified in BSL interpretation we would not have been able to transcribe the interviews and so would have had to employ an interpreter for more hours than we had anticipated in our original grant submission. The cost and time elements of this type of research method were beyond the scope of our proposal and our budget<sup>16</sup>.

Although most of the D/deaf interviewees were happy not to be videoed there are some ethical problems with placing the voiced interpretation of what they signed onto an audio tape. These ethical dilemmas endure as part of this particular research project, we remain unsure of whether they can be resolved. Some of the tape recordings of the interviews have two voices, the researcher conducting the interview and the sign language interpreter putting the sign language of the

15 BSL has a grammar and lexicon that is different to spoken English but it is still as complex and efficient at expressing meaning (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1998). BSL is not mime, gesture or an exaggerated body language. It is a full and complex language which relies on visual patterns of hands and faces to place emphasis and effect where hearing people might raise or lower their voices or might use hand movements to illustrate part of what they are speaking.

16 However, we fully recognise the importance of visual communication for Deaf people. As part of the dissemination of the project we produced a BSL signed and subtitled video to present the summary results of the project. Our original script was totally transformed by BSL users and consequently the video is very much BSL and Deaf-centred. The video production was funded in part through the ESRC project, the Leverhulme Trust and Sheffield University. Copies of the video (including in U.S. format) are available from the authors.

D/deaf person into spoken language. There is therefore a form of exclusion of the interviewee, the D/deaf person, from the recorded form of the interview. It might be argued that this obscures their embodied subjectivity. In addition, sign language interpreters do just that, they interpret. BSL has a grammatical structure different to spoken English, sentence syntax is different, and there are some signs and meanings that are difficult to put into words. What interpreters do (and they do this extremely skilfully) is watch the sign language and simultaneously translate the visual into the spoken and convey what is 'said' in standard English. It was only in the few cases where D/deaf people had enough oral skills to be able to understand the interviewer and speak for the tape that we have a precise record of what they said. In this way we can record those who follow an oral style of communication but have to interpret for those who identify as Deaf and use BSL. The linguistic minority could be said to be marginalised once again by the very methods of this project (but see footnote 16).

When the D/deaf and hearing worlds meet the convention of using interpreters is very well established. The D/deaf people we interviewed were all given the chance to choose a particular interpreter; some of them expressed a preference, others were happy to work with interpreters we employed for the project. There were two interpreters who we worked with extensively. Both were experienced in working with young people, both gave very good 'voice-overs',<sup>17</sup> both were professional in their approach to confidentiality and were clearly trusted by the people we interviewed. One of the interpreters was a lesbian and so her contribution to working with D/deaf gay people was extremely valuable because she was fluent in the gay sign language (idioms, in-jokes, slang terms, etc.) and also clearly not judgmental of anything the young gay people had to say. Both of us as researchers felt that the interpreters grasped the aims of our

17 This is the term used to describe the vocalisation of what the D/deaf person is signing. There is certainly a range of skills amongst interpreters; some are much better at capturing the meaning, intonation and emotion of the sign language. There was one instance where an interpreter effectively gave subtitles, it was clear to the interviewer that the interviewee was expressing much more emotion and providing much more information than was being interpreted. This interpreter was not used again.

project extremely well and so we, too, could trust them in the ways they interpreted our questions within the interviews.

In practical and ethical terms working with interpreters posed some extra challenges for the research. There is a shortage of interpreters within the U.K. and this was one of the things mentioned often by D/deaf people. Due to this shortage arranging times for interviews involving three people were often difficult. Interviews had to be arranged two or three weeks in advance because of the hectic work schedules of the interpreters. The research with D/deaf people took much longer than we had anticipated because of these delays and also because of the problems involved in locating and communicating with a group that is relatively hard to reach. In some of the interviews, interpreters and interviewees had met before in other circumstances, sometimes in very private and personal situations. Hence the assurance of confidentiality and the interpreter's own quick recognition of previous meetings and reassurance of the separateness of these two meetings<sup>18</sup> was very important in putting the D/deaf people at their ease.

As experienced researchers, who have extensively used interviews, our own role during the interviews with D/deaf people was very different from those previous experiences. It was the first time we had conducted interviews in a language we did not know.<sup>19</sup> The usual eye contact with interviewees, considered an important part of establishing rapport, did not happen in interpreted interviews because the D/deaf person needed to watch the interpreter at all times. In Deaf culture there is also a specific etiquette about working with interpreters. It is important that the person actually talking to the interviewee looks at them rather than the interpreter.<sup>20</sup> Hence in an interview

18 Such 'conversations' were often conducted rapidly at the beginning of the interview while the interviewer was busy looking down at the tape recorder, checking they had their notes etc. By not watching these early interactions we, the interviewers, were able to provide a space for privacy.

19 Tracey Skelton has conducted interviews in the Caribbean and for this research she effectively learned a new version of English because the Montserratians she works with speak a very pronounced and complex dialect, with a distinctive and rich accent. However, after two months she was able to understand the creole spoken and after three months able to speak it, so she did not use interpreters (cf. Skelton 2001b).

20 This can be likened to the importance of getting to a similar eye level when talking with someone who uses a wheel chair, rather than 'talking down' to them from standing height.

the interviewer would look at, and speak to, the D/deaf person, the signing of the interpreter would take place a little to the side and the D/deaf person would look at the interpreter who also watches the D/deaf person throughout the interview. The tape recorder mike was pointed at interviewer and interpreter, not at the D/deaf person.

As sign language is a visual language, light was very important in the interview setting. Sitting in front of a window in daylight reduces the visibility of signing and so rooms would often have to be totally reorganised to make sure both interviewee and interpreter were in good visibility without strong light behind them. Such furniture moving often served to break the ice and communicated a willingness of all three people to make the interview setting as comfortable as possible.

Despite some of the organisational challenges, the experiences of working with D/deaf people in the research project was fascinating and rewarding. It was wonderful to witness the richness of sign language and watch young D/deaf people articulate complex ideas and diverse experiences. The research process forced us as researchers to reconsider our roles in a dominant discourse of the hearing world and to consider ways in which we can make our research results more accessible to D/deaf people. We are also aware of the importance of making sure young D/deaf people's perspectives are visible within the academy, youth and educational policy and practice, and wider political contexts.

### **Young D/deaf People's Identities and Cultural Experiences**

In the research project several aspects of young D/deaf people's identities (how they defined themselves, what aspects of their identities they chose to express, where and when, etc.) were explored. The four key sites of daily life experience (home and family, school, work/college, community spaces) were examined to provide a holistic picture of young D/deaf people's lives; what types of experiences they had in these places and the ways in which marginalisation and resistive processes impacted upon those experiences. For the purpose of this article we focus upon some of the ways in which young people articulated a D/deaf identity and their reflections upon the concept of Deaf cul-

ture and a Deaf community. It is, therefore, a partial analysis of young D/deaf people's articulations of their identities and, social and cultural experiences. We have selected quotations to demonstrate the diversity of the young people's articulations around the theme of D/deaf identity. The complexities and contradictions of these self-representations demonstrate the diversity of young D/deaf people's senses of self and reflect the difficulty of defining D/deaf identity. They also show the fluidity of these identities over space and time, and the transformations some of the young people experience as they grow older and enter different spaces of life.

Many young people talked of their initial rejection about being D/deaf. This was expressed by people who had gone deaf later in childhood, about the age of five, or who might be described as 'partially hearing' and who with the use of hearing aids can hear some sounds. Their discussion about being D/deaf is different to those who were born deaf and who are described as severely and profoundly deaf. Jessica was born deaf but diagnosed as 'partially hearing'<sup>21</sup> and so wore hearing aids. She had this to say when asked how she felt about being D/deaf:

Before I always used to... always on at my parents saying 'I hate being deaf', that's what most people do, they say 'Oh I hate being deaf', [I'd say] 'you're getting on to me cos I'm deaf', I get bullied cos I'm deaf and get upset. But nowadays I don't bother... sometimes I like being deaf, if there's a lot of noise just switch off your hearing aid and when my mum's shouting I just switch it off and walk away. (Jessica, 17, college student, oral communication interview<sup>22</sup>)

Sophie went deaf at the age of five and describes how she felt when this happened:

Well you know I was really surprised, I was shocked really, I didn't want to be deaf, I think I had seen some people who were deaf and I didn't like that, I didn't like them doing sign language, I just didn't like it I thought 'Oooh I don't want to be deaf' and

21 'Partially hearing' is problematised because it is a hearing, medical model term that defines deafness as measured against 'normal' hearing levels. Hence Jessica is diagnosed as 'partially hearing' not as 'partially deaf'.

22 Unless stated otherwise all quotations are from interpreted BSL.

when they told me I was deaf and I realised that I couldn't hear any more I was really shocked I realised that I couldn't hear birds singing, I couldn't hear noises in the street, lots of things, just suddenly couldn't hear anything. I didn't know I was deaf—until my parents were shouting at me—it sort of happened without me noticing that it had happened. But I really, really didn't want to be deaf so I just pretended I wasn't deaf, and I just pretended that it wasn't happening to me and that I could hear but my mum said to me 'You know you've got to learn to communicate in a different way because you can't hear anything, you have to accept that you're deaf' and so I did, I sort of started to realise that I was deaf.

Later she was asked if now, at the age of 17, she felt proud to be a D/deaf person:

Yes, yes I think so you have to be, I mean, you know sometimes I think I would rather be hearing because I know there are things that I don't hear, I can't really remember that much because I was only little when I went deaf, but sometimes I think it would be nice to hear because things are easy, but when I'm with my Deaf friends and we're signing and we are really getting on well and someone is telling a really good story then I think, 'No, it's okay, it's good' I've got a different way of life, a different way of communicating so I don't think that's too bad really. (Sophie, 17, college student)

Sophie therefore went through a stage of complete denial about her D/deafness but as she grew older she learned new ways of communicating and has begun to accept her difference and even move towards a sense of pride in this difference, in being Deaf.

Sean (aged 23) was born deaf and described himself as 'profoundly deaf'.<sup>23</sup> He was asked 'Can you remember a time when you realised that you couldn't hear but that other people could?'

Erm, no, no I can't remember, it feels like being Deaf is normal, they're hearing, I'm Deaf...I've never really thought about it, there was no real sense of shock, no.

23 This would mean that Sean's medical diagnosis would indicate that there would be no 'benefit' in him using hearing aids, although in his oral school he was forced to wear them and had to try and learn to speak rather than sign.

Later in the interview when asked how he felt about being deaf he said that he felt proud and

I think it's peaceful, I think it's great... sometimes in a way I wish that I could speak, I think it would be easier to speak to hearing people but Deaf people travel more, you mix more, there's lots of things going on in Deaf people's lives.

Sean therefore recognises the ease with which hearing people can move through the hearing world, but he argues that as a Deaf person he is confident he can achieve a great deal. He recognises a difference between himself and hearing people but does not see the difference as a loss on his part.

Karl (aged 22 and currently unemployed<sup>24</sup>) attended oral schools and so had to speak through his primary education (aged 5 to 11) but was introduced to BSL and SSE when he was 11 in a partially-hearing unit (PHU) attached to a mainstream school. He experienced a lot of bullying and got involved in fights with hearing pupils at the school. Hearing children mimicked and teased him and others from the PHU about being D/deaf. Karl was one of the pupils who used to fight back. He described his secondary education as 'rubbish, just rubbish, they [teachers] didn't care'. For the interview he used SSE because he said that BSL was too hard to learn but that more recently he was trying to learn it again because 'most of my mates are deaf and only a few of them talk, most sign'. He said that his friends were 'full deaf' having described himself as 'half deaf' being able to hear more in one ear than the other. He used his hearing aid at home but would not wear it in public. Repetitive themes throughout Karl's interview were that things were *boring* and that he felt *embarrassed*. These seemed to be reflections about how he felt about his life and also about himself. He said this about his local Deaf Club, 'It was doing my head in... all kids messing around... I finished it quick, embarrassing... Deaf Club is just full of old people, boring'. Hence he felt at an 'in-between' age for

24 Karl's interview was with an interpreter to sign the questions but he chose to speak on the tape, although in some cases what he said had to be clarified by the interpreter using sign. If he ever signed the term 'deaf' then he just articulated this on his ear rather than articulating Deaf through a movement of the sign from the ear to his cheek. Karl may have not known this subtlety in BSL, but it was clear from his interview that he did not identify as Deaf but as deaf.

what his local Deaf Club was providing; too old for the youth club, too young for the adult part of the Club (cf. other research on young people's spatial 'unbelonging' Sibley 1995, Skelton 2000, Skelton and Valentine 1998). He described the television programs made for and by D/deaf people as boring, 'they never show anything I'm interested in'. He remembered being embarrassed at, and ashamed of, having to wear a bulky body-worn hearing aid when at primary school. Even though all the other children at his school for the deaf wore hearing aids he said that his made him feel like a robot. Karl therefore expressed embarrassment about being D/deaf, was dissatisfied with the social resources at his local Deaf Club yet all of his friends were D/deaf. When asked how he felt about being D/deaf he said 'I feel alright but it's lucky for hearing people 'cos they can hear everything that's going on'. Karl therefore identifies with other D/deaf people, his friendship group is drawn from old school friends from the PHU, and yet he regards his life chances as less than those available to hearing peers.

With limited language skills Karl could demonstrate little reflexivity and expressed no familiarity with Deaf culture even though his social group is a D/deaf one. Karl can get by fairly well in the hearing world, he said that he felt happy going into hearing bars and clubs and coped all right with shopping, travelling around and so forth. However, Karl experiences a relatively limited world for someone who is 22; he still lives with his mother and is not employed. He has travelled very little beyond his home city. He can manage to some extent in the D/deaf world but clearly did not feel that he fitted into, or was fully content in, either socio-spatial world. He seemed happy in himself but had little to say about the world, his life and experiences.

For Bernice her identity as a D/deaf person was combined with her identity as a Muslim. A daughter of Pakistani parents she attended her local schools for the deaf which followed an oral system of education. Bernice said that at primary school she just could not understand what was going on but that she enjoyed the playtime with other D/deaf children. At home she found she could not communicate with hearing children in the neighbourhood and felt left out of local play. At secondary school age (11 to 16) she attended a PHU within a hearing school. Here she said there was a lot of

fighting between the D/deaf and hearing children because of bullying and teasing by the hearing children. She said that the teachers were hopeless and didn't help her even though she was consistently bullied by hearing pupils. She found attending college to study art at the age of 16 'fantastic' and a 'real relief'. She had already begun to learn BSL at secondary school but had been mimicked and bullied by the hearing children when using sign. She currently attends a further education college and has an interpreter who works with her to support her studies. This, she feels, has been a breakthrough for her in her education:

It's [the support] fantastic, it's really clear, you get the information delivered to you really clearly, you can... my signing has improved a lot, there are some signs which I, that I've never seen before, I'm learning an awful lot, there's some really lovely signing going on here.

(Bernice, 21, college student)

Bernice stated that she feels proud to be a D/deaf person and 'I feel very comfortable as a Deaf person, I just do my own thing, I'm just quiet'. However when asked about being both Asian and D/deaf she replied:

Well when I talk to my white Deaf friends, I'm not a hundred percent confident, I can mix with either Deaf or hearing people in the Asian community... I'm I'm much more comfortable mixing with the Muslim culture, yeah, I do, I do find it easier.

However, in another part of the interview she explains that as her confidence in using BSL has grown, she wants to sign more and more but her sister who usually escorts her everywhere does not want Bernice to sign because of the way people look at them when they sign. Bernice said that in the past she would have listened to her sister, and that she felt embarrassed herself. Currently though she said that she tells her sister to stop worrying and that signing is her language, she said that now she does not care about other people looking. Towards the end of the interview Bernice talked about the way in which she felt isolated from the Deaf Club because for her age there are only the sports clubs and the Wednesday night social evenings. She is not happy to go there because there is a bar and that contradicts her

religion as a Muslim. However, as a D/deaf person she feels there is a lot of her religious culture and her home life which she cannot access because she is D/deaf. Family members tended to forget to include her or would tell her small parts of what was being said or was happening:

I just feel that it can be a problem being at home, not understanding what's going on. I really wish I had a Deaf Islamic club that I could go to, where everybody's talking and chatting, having fun and you'd understand what was going on. At home they're having a good time but I just don't know what's going on... [at] the Muslim gatherings and the family gatherings I don't have access to [what's going on], I really wish I could get that [a Deaf Muslim club] but there isn't such a thing.<sup>25</sup>

For Bernice being Deaf and being a Muslim are important and meaningful parts of her identity. However, she finds it difficult to participate fully in D/deaf culture because it does not seem to have the space or understanding of her faith and also to participate fully in Muslim culture, because she cannot access it fully because of her D/deafness. Bernice said that no one who was a Muslim could communicate with her in BSL, apart from one of her sisters who used a version of sign language to communicate basic requests and information. Her interview ended with her expressing a combined sense of resignation that this was how life was but also an element of optimism as she hoped to meet more D/deaf people, especially D/deaf Muslims, as she got older and moved into different environments. She was confident of continuing her education at university in a city where she knew there were more Muslims and a fairly large D/deaf community.

## Conclusions

This article has examined a range of complexities and intricacies in the discussion of D/deafness and young people's D/deaf identities. We have shown that while hearing people often equate D/deafness with disability, D/deaf people themselves do not

all see it in the same way. From a perspective of Deaf culture, Deaf identity and political rights are linked much more to being part of a linguistic minority. If more services were provided in BSL and more hearing people showed Deaf awareness and/or learned BSL then Deaf people would not face the social exclusions and marginalisation they currently do.

For D/deaf young people their late teenage years are significant in the formation of their D/deaf identities, as is so for the identity formation of other young people. In the places where they can use BSL, for many there is a confidence and sense of self worth about being D/deaf and being part of the D/deaf community. However, for some young people there is a tension around their identities. This is because they lack the linguistic competence to really belong to Deaf or hearing culture (Karl), because they identify (or are identified) more with deafness and an oral culture (Eleanor), or because their D/deaf identity is combined with other, sometimes, competing identities (Bernice, and some of the lesbian and gay young people). Because the D/deaf world is a relatively small one, both numerically and spatially, for those who do not fit in there are few, if any, alternative choices. There is usually one Deaf Club in each major city. If this Deaf Club does not provide a welcome to, or the space for, D/deaf people who also express and articulate other identities (young, deaf, Muslim, lesbian, gay) then the D/deaf community can be a closed and exclusionary one. All types of human identities are complex and often contradictory, but in a small, excluded and already isolated community such as the D/deaf world, the tensions between competing or different identities can have profound social and spatial implications.

It is important that as researchers, and those who might participate in such research, we think about the ways in which we define and represent D/deaf people, or indeed any groups of people with various impairments. The binary categories of D/deaf/hearing, Deaf/deaf are not really very useful in capturing the complexities and 'in-betweenity' of young D/deaf people's identities. Their identities are deeper than these binaries allow space for. There is evidence within the D/deaf community and in Deaf culture that exclusionary tendencies are being addressed. Mission and welcome statements addressed to all D/deaf

25 In fact there are Muslim D/deaf clubs or certainly nights in Deaf Clubs which are organised by D/deaf Muslims. However, these are in cities where there is a numerically large Muslim D/deaf community, such a population did not exist in the towns and cities where we conducted our research.

people and their families and friends in the foyers of D/deaf Clubs and Societies are an indication of such shifts. The Royal National Institute of the Deaf (RNID) steadfastly talks and campaigns for Deaf and hearing impaired people. BSL is changing too, signs for nations or people that in the past have played on stereotypes (pointing to the centre of the forehead for Indian, pulling the eyes into a slant for Chinese, for example) are being questioned and changed. This is a transformation that is coming from within as D/deaf people engage in a wider politics of identity and inclusion.

There are increasing challenges to hearing definitions and representations of D/deaf worlds. These contestations are manifest through such processes as: marches and demonstrations to demand the official recognition of BSL as a minority language; growing access to D/deaf-related information and campaign groups over the Internet; a turn against oralism and a move towards bilingualism within some Local Education Authorities and the growth of television programs for and about the D/deaf. These, combined with increased and visible discourses around D/deaf pride and identity, imply that what it means to be young and D/deaf in Britain today is being transformed. There is also evidence of changes in the ways in which hearing people use discriminatory gazes and practices to perpetuate an age-old exclusion of D/deaf people from hearing society. In the U.K., Deaf Awareness and BSL stage 1, are among the fastest growing evening classes in several cities, more people can communicate with D/deaf people than ever before (using both oral and signing modes). There is a growing respect for, and admiration of, BSL as a language. This is no doubt enhanced by such popular expressions of the language as seen in the award winning film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* where sign language between the main character and his D/deaf brother allows the choice of true love to be followed. D/deaf people, and their allies in the hearing world, are working to change society and space to ensure that D/deaf people, and young D/deaf people in particular, may have greater opportunities to achieve their full potential.

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