

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – March 23 - 27, 2009

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An appropriate, all-inclusive term to represent people with hearing loss is “hearing impaired.” True or false?

Scroll down for the answer.

Answer: It depends on your perspective. Generally, deaf people consider this term inappropriate at best and offensive at worst. It is a term often preferred and used by people in the medical professions and other groups that focus on the hearing loss or a deficit model of deafness. Originally it was coined with the intention of not offending because some professionals believed that “deaf” was a negative way of referring to people with hearing loss and not inclusive enough to represent all people with hearing loss.

Organizations of deaf people like the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) since 1991 have agreed that the term “hearing impaired” was not appropriate usage and that an all-inclusive way to refer to people with hearing loss should be “deaf and hard of hearing.” The NAD provides an article on the use of terminology to refer to people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Check out: <http://www.nad.org/site/pp.asp?c=foINKQMBF&b=103786>.

In this article they state: “Hearing-impaired is a well-meaning word that is much resented by deaf and hard of hearing people.” The NAD strives consistently in all of its communication to use the term “deaf and hard of hearing” to represent the all-inclusive term. Matthew Moore & Linda Levitan (1996) in their book *For Hearing People Only*, (pp. 229-233), provide a very good discussion of this term and its implications. This book is recommended reading for people wishing to understand more about “the Deaf community, its culture and the ‘Deaf Reality’ ” (from cover of *For Hearing People Only*).