

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – May 24 – 28, 2010

Bill Newell, Principal Washington School for the Deaf

Which of the following is not a Deaf cultural value?

- a. Individualism
- b. Disassociation with speech
- c. Collectivism
- d. Keeping others informed

Scroll down for the answer

Answer: “a” – Individualism.

Deaf culture is collectivist in nature as opposed to American culture which is very individualist. That is members of Deaf culture value the group and place value in the accomplishments of the group versus the individual. This value manifests itself in many behaviors. For example, Deaf people will ask new acquaintances how they are connected to the group. If the new acquaintance is Deaf they will want to know about the person’s educational background, where they are from and whether they know other members of the culture who may live in the area. The Deaf world is close knit and Deaf people will generally know many other Deaf people within the community and across the nation and even worldwide. If the new acquaintance is hearing and an ASL user the Deaf people will want to know how the person is connected to the Deaf World. If they are learning ASL they will want to know who the person’s teacher is. They will be curious if the person has Deaf parents or relatives. Developing these connections to the group is an important value.

Another way this collectivist value manifests itself is in marrying and socializing within the group. Deaf people generally marry other members of Deaf culture and socialize with other members of the group. Keeping people informed is a behavior associated with the collectivist nature of Deaf culture. It is considered rude to “disappear from a group gathering without saying goodbye to most if not all of the people present.” This leave-taking can sometimes take a good half hour or more before one actually leaves a group gathering. Excusing yourself to at least some members of a group so that they know where you are is another way this value collectivist value is displayed. For example, if a Deaf person needs to excuse himself to go to the bathroom, it would be expected to inform some members of the group so that they know you where you are and that you will soon return.

To read more about Deaf culture, you can read information at this website:

<http://www.netac.rit.edu/publication/tipsheet/deafculture.html>

A couple of excellent books on this subject:

Deaf in American: Voices from a culture by Carol Padden & Tom Humphries

Inside Deaf Culture, Carol Padden and Tom Humphries

National Public Radio (NPR) aired an hour long broadcast on Deaf Culture.

Listen here:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4474055>

Complete transcripts of this broadcast for Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons is available from NPR Here:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4476250&ps=rs>