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#### Random Quotes

The purpose of life, after all, is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.  
- E. Roosevelt

#### Recent Comments

john : finally about time locate in frederick locate. I have been search and research all long.. also I have question...

Eric Brady : I found your website while doing a search on a question I was pondering and was wondering if you had a...

Brian M : Good idea about private meeting via webcam...COOL

paz : Hi all, Is it possible for deaf researchers to study subjects who are hearing? I think it is possible however we...

Karen : There is a nice powerpoint on the same topic. All schools should follow the no-cut policy. Thank you for...

#### Recent Posts

12-Step and Support Meetings via WebCam

Deaf Alcoholics Anonymous Group in Frederick, MD

How Long Can I Expect to be in Therapy?

How Often are Appointments Scheduled?

Isn't Psychotherapy for People Who are Weak or Crazy?

How is Psychotherapy Different from Talking with Friends and Family?

No Cut Policy for Sports in Deaf Schools

Deaf People's Knowledge and Views Related to Mental Health

What is Psychotherapy?

## ASC ON THE COUCH

### What's up with the Big-D in Deaf?

November 7, 2006



**The Capitalization Question:** Not long ago, a reader asked us why we use the capitalized version of Deaf in our blog and website. This question brought us back to our thoughts last year, when we were in the middle of writing the text for the ASC website and debating the D/d issue. Opting to capitalize Deaf was not something we decided on a whim, nor was it a separatist type of move. We did it consciously, out of inclusion, out of practicality, and out of pride.

**Deaf as an Inclusive Term:** Far from viewing "Deaf" as a way of excluding people, we see the term as an inclusive one. To us, "Deaf" refers to any people who happen to be Deaf. It has nothing to do with having Deaf or hearing parents, or using ASL, SEE, spoken English, cued speech, or any other communication modality. Neither does it matter if one was mainstreamed, educated at a Deaf school, or homeschooled. Degree of hearing loss, being Deaf from birth or being late-Deafened, using a hearing aid or a cochlear implant - none of these, in our minds, precludes anyone from being Deaf.

Capitalizing Deaf parallels capitalizing African American, Jewish, Hispanic, and so on, with each of these capitalized designations referring to a group of people with their own culture and physical characteristics (i.e., skin color, bloodline, hearing status). All of these terms are inclusive. Some Jewish people may be observant Orthodox Jews, centering their lives around their religion, while others may simply identify as Jewish through their family lineage and never set foot in a temple. Some Jewish people speak Hebrew, while others don't. Similarly, some Hispanic Americans may be fluent Spanish speakers, while others, perhaps third- or fourth-generation Hispanic Americans, may not be conversant in Spanish at all. Some may have dark brown skin, while others may have light brown skin, and still others might "pass" as Caucasian.

None of these differences function as exclusionary criteria. Jewish people are Jewish, African Americans are African American, and Deaf people are Deaf, no matter what individual differences might exist within these groups.

**Deaf as a Practical Term:** By using Deaf as an inclusive term, we are able to avoid the cumbersome use of a string of words describing different kinds of Deaf people. Which is easier reading?:

A) It's important to know that being Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, hearing impaired, Deaf-blind, or late-deafened itself is not a cause of depression.

Or

B) It's important to know that being Deaf itself is not a cause of depression.

The practice of switching back and forth between Deaf and deaf, depending on the situation, is awkward and unnecessarily complicated. We don't see Jewish, African American, or Latina being used to differentiate less-observant Jews, lighter-skinned African Americans, or non-Spanish speaking Latina people. It is simpler to reserve the use of "deaf" for when it is not referring specifically to people. For example: "She was deaf to his pleas".

Of course, when distinctions need to be made between Deaf people (i.e., for research or assessment purposes), we understand the usefulness of terms like those mentioned above (i.e., hard of hearing, late-deafened, etc.). We also respect people's choices in how they decide to describe themselves.

**Deaf Pride:** Why not just get rid of the big D and use "deaf" to refer to all people who are Deaf? We did consider doing this, but in the end, we felt it important to acknowledge that Deaf people are a unique group of people. In the same way that the J in Jewish is capitalized, the B in Black, and the L in Latina, we choose to capitalize the D in Deaf to reflect our pride in our community and culture.

Posted by ASCDEAF under [Assessment](#), [Deaf Issues](#), [Language](#), [Research](#) on |

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- Ella** says:  
[November 7th, 2006 at 2:36 pm](#)

Thanks. Hope this helps clarify that for other organizations working with Deaf people. And help people be more embracing of the Deaf culture and language and identity.
- anon** says:  
[November 7th, 2006 at 7:45 pm](#)

You'll have to inform the rather sizable contingent of deaf folk who outright state that anyone who does not speak ASL is absolutely not a Deaf person regardless of any level of physical hearing loss.

\*That's\* the reason I use "deaf" for all.
- Katie** says:  
[November 8th, 2006 at 8:28 am](#)

Glad you are back! I miss reading your posts. Good points. Never thought about capitalizing Deaf all the time.
- raychelle** says:  
[November 26th, 2006 at 12:00 pm](#)

Excellent brain gum. As you can see by my late response, I've been thinking about this for quite a while.

Let's reverse roles. Maybe we do have something to teach others? Our distinction between D and d might spill over to Jewish, African American and Hispanic communities? Maybe they need a way to distinguish between those who identify strongly with the community and those who do not? Do they have a way to identify those differences? Do they want to identify the differences? Hmm.

Personally, I feel this D/d distinction, although divisive, should not be swept under the rug just to please people who feel offended by this distinction. Everyone knows there are big D and d differences - the issue here is how to identify it in English writing.

For instance,  
"Those deaf people (who identify with ASL and deaf culture) and those deaf people (who are more comfortable in the hearing world) all are attending the birthday party of the president. Be prepared for a nice surprise as those deaf people (who are more comfortable in the hearing world) are planning a musical for the president"

It's wordy, and is a lot of work. Confusing too, if used again and again throughout an article. What would you suggest in its place?

But then again, one may argue that those who identify with ASL and deaf culture might want to participate in the musical, and those who are more comfortable in the hearing world might not care for music...

Labels are what they are - they assume a group is what it is. But labels are also a source of pride. I want people to know I'm 100% Woman, down to my painted toenails. But I also don't want bank loaners to know I'm learning disabled in math or they'll think I can't balance my bank account - which I darned sure can, better than Einstein himself.

Ah, I'm rambling here... Bottom line, I think the D/d distinction is here to stay - unless a better replacement comes by. ASL community as opposed to deaf people? Clear? Hmm. I'll keep thinking about this 😊 Adios...
- Jean Boutcher** says:  
[April 20th, 2007 at 2:10 pm](#)

Practically everyone in the deaf community has been asking around as to why there is no deaf/Deaf in dictionaries for about a decade. Eureka! Never have I noticed under my nose for fifteen (15) years until now there does exist a dictionary that contains two separate definitions for d/D. It is in The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, 1992. In the dictionary, "deaf" is defined as "the lack of hearing sense" whereas "Deaf" is defined as "Of relating to the Deaf or their culture." We should tell other dictionary makers to add this entry in theirs. 😊
- Moggy** says:  
[April 30th, 2007 at 12:32 pm](#)

At some point a couple of years ago, I think it was, I started capitalizing the term Autistic. I've never fully been able to explain why, and at the moment I don't really have time to try yet again.

I was following links from one blog or entry to the next, though, wandered to ASC On The Couch, and found this excellent post with far more points that I'd even thought of: "What's up with the Big-D in Deaf?"

I highly recommend it, even if you don't personally opt to capitalize whatever your disability is. I also noticed that the left sidebar has topic posts that would be good to explore as well, hinting there'd plenty more on the site to check out!

7. **Tom Willard** says:  
[October 17th, 2007 at 4:34 pm](#)

When I see this sentence:

B) It's important to know that being Deaf itself is not a cause of depression.

I instinctively think: "It's important to know that being culturally Deaf itself is not a cause of depression."

Since the D is capitalized, I don't even think of those other groups you mentioned. I only think of the deafies who went to deaf schools, used ASL all their lives, consort mostly with one another, etc. You know, the Deaf culture.

You're facing an uphill battle with this one. I'm just telling you how I honestly react seeing the 'deaf' capitalized. I came of age in the 80s when the militants were insisting it be capitalized; I didn't agree then and don't agree now.

Feel free to see my blog for further thoughts on this subject.

8. **Position Statement on Autistic Culture « Subtext :: Deconstructing Neurelitism :: The Praxis of an Autistic Self among Selves** says:  
[April 20th, 2009 at 3:23 am](#)

[...] This approach to capitalization, which is already being practiced by some Autists, has long been in use within the Deaf community. As explained on the Alternative Solutions Center blog: [...]

9. **susan** says:  
[May 12th, 2009 at 8:16 am](#)

marlee matlin uses capital D in her new book, "I will Scream Later." i was surprise, but i am glad marlee did it. More Deaf people will agree with you, ASC.



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