# Representation of the Deaf Community in a Digital Age: Social Media as a Cultural Tool

**Veronica Pistek**  
Department of Media Studies  
College of Staten Island, CUNY  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Edward Miller

## Background
An analysis of ASL history, the Deaf community, along with research into the accessibility for Deaf users on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter are explored to gain an understanding of how social media acts as a cultural tool for and against Deaf users.

## Hypothesis
By taking a deep dive into what aspects of Deaf culture, communication issues, and societal issues are represented in social media posts, one can discover how social media sites potentially enable the exploitation and silencing of Deaf culture.

## Data and Findings

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<td>After sending out a Google Forms survey across email, Facebook, Instagram, and private messaging, there were 110 anonymous respondents. 102 identified as a hearing person, 7 people identified as hard of hearing person, and 1 person identified as deaf person, ranging from ages 18-73.</td>
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## Theoretical Foundations
1) **Spectacle of the Other (Stuart Hall):** Marginalized groups constructed through their representations.

2) **Self Concept Theory (John Turner):** Self evaluation relies on how others perceive them.

3) **Frame Theory (L. Bauman):** Framing one’s language aids in shaping identity.

## Research Questions
1) How are Deaf people represented in different forms of social media?  
2) What are the advantages and disadvantages (accessibility) of this media for the Deaf community?  
3) How does the media present advocacy for and against Deafness as a cultural identity?  
4) In what ways does online discourse display traces of audism?  
5) How do social media sites like YouTube & TikTok enable exploitation/commodification of Deaf culture?

## Methodology
Respondents were asked to answer a series of short answer questions about their attitudes, knowledge, and experiences with American Sign Language and interacting with the Deaf Community. Some questions asked participants to recall forms of content and media that represents the Deaf community, as well as their personal experience of making online content accessible for people with varying ranges of deafness. Responses were recorded automatically by Google Forms.

## Conclusions
The lack of accessibility and representation of Deaf online creators on social media platforms has resulted in the lack of knowledge and experiences with Deaf people in the hearing community.

Deaf people have gained a larger audience than before, yet now experience new forms of oppression through cultural appropriation from hearing creators.

In order for people to learn more about Deaf culture, social media users need to actively follow Deaf creators, engage in Deaf events, support by sharing educational content made by a deaf person, and being inclusive when sharing any audio or video based post.

## References