

## **African American Parents' Perceptions of an American Deaf Community: Where's the Poetic Justice?**

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*Poetic prose, a creative qualitative technique, is used to present the findings (emerging themes) of in-depth, thematic interviews with 14 African American parents with deaf children. This is presented in a multi-vocal, interactive, and interwoven style. This style of interweaving voices of participants in a creative poetic prose is indicative of African American cultural and oral traditions. It also permits and deepens the reader's ability to emotionally and spiritually connect with experiences and emotions of African American parents and their perceptions of an American deaf community. This research was conducted using a modified grounded theory approach where theory (grand narrative) and communal-personal-based narratives interact. Afrocentricism offers a powerful conceptual frame for organizing these experiences of parents of deaf children within the deaf community and schools for deaf children. Key Words: Deaf Children, Deaf Schools, Deaf Community, African American Families, Racism, Afrocentricity, Poetic Prose, and Multi-Vocal Text*

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### **Introduction**

The purpose of the present study was to examine African American parents of deaf children's views and perceptions of an American deaf community. There is a dearth of information in this area of exploration, particularly from the perspective of African Americans. As Rubin and Babbie (1993) indicate if an area is relatively new or has not been researched, the exploratory approach is an appropriate vehicle for empirical study. Previous studies of families of deaf children have revealed a range of sample sizes, from as few as one to more than ten (Beazley & Moore, 1995; Gerner de Garcia, 1993; Meadow-Orlans, 1996).

Parenting a young child with hearing loss tends to entail simultaneous interaction with several communities. For example, among deaf people a cultural definition as it pertains to deafness has evolved in the United States during the past decade (Holcomb, 1993; Steinberg, 1997; Steinberg & Davila, 1997). Deaf children within this cultural framework are viewed as belonging to a distinct cultural group in which a shared, common language (American Sign Language) and a common "Deaf" culture are evidence of a Deaf community (Carney & Moeller, 1998; Padden & Humphries, 1988). Thus, the use of a capitalized, separate term "Deaf" is used to describe their common feature (Carney & Moeller, 1998; Meadow, 1978; Meadow-Orlans, 1996; Padden & Humphries).

With the addition of “Deaf” culture, African American children would be classified as multicultural (Carney & Moeller, 1998; Cohen, 1993; Cohen, Redding & Fischgrund, 1990; Lane, 1996; Stewart & Benson, 1991). Their behavior may then be a reflection of very distinct cultural orientations that are uniquely tied to each one’s life, stemming from very different cultural experiences. For example, African American children are immersed in an African American culture, the dominant Euro-White American culture, and Deaf culture, which “unfortunately often refers to white Deaf culture, a phenomenon that has created a form of apartheid within the Deaf community itself” (Cohen, 1993, p. 54).

The focus on the dominant group’s culture within the Deaf community as it relates specifically to deaf children, the social identity, or identity politics become a predicament for African American families with deaf children, whose life experiences, culture, and history in the U.S. are significantly different. The construction of a Deaf culture emanating from a Deaf community poses challenges to African American parents who must negotiate with American Deaf communities, particularly when their deaf children attend schools for deaf children.

For example, Atkin, Ahmad, and Jones (2002) as well as Ahmad, Darr, Jones, and Nisar (1998) found perceptions within the British Deaf community among interviewed South Asian families with deaf children. Similarly, Cohen (1993) states that African American and Hispanic/Latino families perceive schools for deaf children and the Deaf community as engaging in observable racist behavior, and lacking awareness of cultural and ethnic differences among families and their deaf children. Thus, of particular importance to this paper, are African American parents’ perceptions of the, largely White, “Deaf community.”

### **Review of the Literature**

The year is 1988, the week of the famous “Deaf President Now” protest. Carried by deaf members was a banner reading, “We Still Have a Dream!” Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous speeches are incited and used symbolically as an expression of deaf peoples’ oppression in a “hearing world.” In fact, strategies, techniques, and rhetoric were all directly “borrowed” from the Civil Rights Movement. Ironically, though, deaf people of color had their own internal protest within this now historic Deaf protest (Gilchrist & Stuart, 1991). Deaf people of color felt excluded and alienated in this historic movement (Gilchrist and Stuart; Schein, 1989). For example, in Gilchrist and Stuart, Angel Ramos, a Hispanic deaf man who taught math at Gallaudet University during this time commented,

I remember on the third day of the protest, a steering committee had gathered together all the deaf leaders from various organizations in the United States. They had selected about 20 leaders to speak out in support of the protest. I was sitting in the audience, and I looked up at the group of 20 white people who had been chosen. I thought to myself, “There are no black leaders up there; there are no Hispanic leaders up there.” ...it was the same kind of oversight we minority deaf experience again and again in the deaf world. (pp. 2 and 4)

Rosen (1986) describe the deaf community as a microcosm similar to that of any heterogeneous community and that it also represents a cross-section of society at large. The “common denominator is the inability to hear and its ramifications” (Rosen, p. 241): Thus, the explicit ramification of one’s inability to hear is the use of American Sign Language. Schein (1989), on the other hand, states that membership in the deaf community is voluntary on the part of deaf people, who use sign language as their primary language; a deaf person simply chooses to be a member or not a member in the deaf community. Why some deaf people join this community and others do not remains a mystery: There is a dearth of research studies that have specifically delved into issues related to this topic of membership. However, according to Taylor Gatto (1992), when integration is unattainable in the life that stems from being a part of a family and/or community, the only viable alternative, apart from accepting an isolated life, is to find an artificial type of integration or pseudo-community. Pseudo-communities then, control the human association and masquerade as a real community.

It is important for communities of color, and in this case the African American community, to be aware that schools for deaf children lag considerably behind in desegregation efforts than schools for hearing children. In fact, in the 1950s thirteen states were still operating separate and segregated schools for deaf children. As late as 1964, eight states had maintained their separate facilities (Hairston & Smith, 1983). As a result, many White families of White deaf children attended segregated schools for the most part. This generation of students, now adults, have not had much of an opportunity to experience desegregation in schools for deaf children. For example, according to Dr. Steven Chough, an Asian deaf man who was the International Student Coordinator at Gallaudet University during the Deaf President Now Movement,

Deafness does not erase racism...The issue of racism in the deaf community is no different from the issue of racism in the hearing community. While it is true that deaf people are bound by the commonality of hearing loss, we still come from diverse backgrounds that are influenced by the larger society. The deaf community needs to learn to respect cultural differences within its own community and realize that we are not all the same just because we are all deaf. (Gilchrist & Stuart, 1991, p. 3)

Even with the elimination of legal segregation in schools for deaf children, there is still evidence of racial segregation in these schools that continues to divide deaf children. In a study of deaf students at residential schools for deaf children Hagborg (1989) noted that White deaf adolescents had a strong preference for interacting only with other White deaf adolescents; however, there was no such preference noted among deaf adolescents of color. Hagborg stated that such preferences for segregation are typical seen in situations where one group has dominance in a multiracial nation. How this preference for segregation manifests itself in an American deaf community, in the metro Washington, DC area (D.C., Virginia, and Maryland) and Pennsylvania, is the nature of this study: African American parents’ perceptions of an American deaf

community in which their deaf children receive services and attend elementary and high schools.

### **An Afrocentric Theoretical Conception of Community**

Afrocentricity is a “philosophical outlook determined by history” (a way of living, thinking, and knowing). It places African American history, culture, and African heritage at the center of the lives of persons of African descent (Akbar, 1998; Asante, 1990). To understand African American families one needs to recognize this central organizing principal underlying African American culture. The cosmological aspects of an Afrocentric worldview entail viewing reality from the perspective of interdependency, where all elements of the universe are interconnected. The ontological aspects (e.g., view of human nature) assume all elements of the universe (e.g., people, animals, inanimate objects, etc.) are spiritual: all elements are created from this universal, spiritual substance. Epistemologically, a great deal of emphasis is placed on an affective way of knowing and obtaining information, which underscores interpersonal relationships as the highest value.

Using an Afrocentric theoretical framework and underlying assumptions, communities are a collection of families and friends, who find meaning in the extension of family associations to a group of closely bonded families and individual persons. In essence, the model of the extended family becomes the basis for such communities where the identity of each is conceived collectively. Everyone is regarded as “sisters and brothers” each who impinge on each other’s consciousness. Thus, a community is a collection of families who live their lives and function in a participatory manner (Butler, 1992; Martin & Martin, 1995; Taylor Gatto, 1992).

Moreover, a community is one where people actually have *face-to-face* contact in *all* their human diversity and variation, both the good and respectable as well as the bad and disrespectful, and over an extended period of time. It represents a place, both physical and spiritual, where lives entail engagement, participation, reciprocity, and accountability: Community folks actually argue and debate with their doctors, teachers/professors, ministers, lawyers, and administrators as expected of a community. Everyone is accountable to everyone else (Ani, 1994; Martin & Martin, 1995; Taylor Gatto, 1992).

While urban ethnographers and planners may convene to ponder the problems facing persons living and surviving in the midst of economic exploitation, a community will regard such persons as *real* people and not in such abstract terms. Johnny, Bobby, or Mr./Mrs. so and so: a community will call its so-called “economically exploited” by their *real* names. In a human-centered paradigm, such as Afrocentricity, these values make a world of difference (McAdoo, 1985; Schiele, 2000). Afrocentricity, as a way of life, is a worldview encompassing one’s historical and contemporary cultural milieu within the context of community. Their perceptions, interpersonal relationships, language, communication, values, and family dynamics unite in their diversity in an Afrocentric concept of community (Martin & Martin, 1995; McAdoo, 1985). How people actually *live* their lives and pass on these values in varied forms, generation after generation, is the basis of Afrocentricity

I teach her everyday that she can be anything she wants to be. I tell her, All you have to do is strive to be good and hold on to that rope, and if you keep pulling on it, you will reach the top; but, DON'T step on anybody! You need to always help someone less fortunate than you. If you got food and someone else doesn't have it, give it to them.

### **Methods**

A qualitative, exploratory study was conducted to examine African American parents' experiences raising a deaf child of African descent in the United States. As Rubin and Babbie (1993) indicate if an area is relatively new or has not been researched, the exploratory approach is an appropriate vehicle for empirical study. Previous studies of families of deaf children have revealed a range of sample sizes, from as few as one to more than ten (Beazley & Moore, 1995; Gerner de Garcia, 1993; Meadow-Orlans, 1996). For the present study, a purposive sample consisted of 14 African American parents or caretakers.

A flyer for the recruitment of African American hearing families of deaf and hard of hearing children was sent to all families of deaf children attending and/or receiving services from an elementary school for deaf children and a high school for deaf adolescents, both located in Washington, D.C. Flyers were also sent to families at Alexander Graham Bell Association, Maryland Chapter: However, no families fit the criteria of African American families of deaf children (birth to 17 years of age). Flyers were also sent to African American families from the Delaware County receiving services for deaf children.

A flyer inviting participation in research about African American hearing families with deaf and hard of hearing children was posted on the bulletin board at speech and hearing clinics in the Washington, DC area. Follow-up flyers/invitations to participate in research about African American hearing families of deaf and hard of hearing children were also sent personally via mail, specifically to the homes of African American hearing families of deaf and hard of hearing children attending the above schools for deaf children and adolescents.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

After the approval from University Institutional Review Boards, each participating family was given: (1) a consent for investigative procedures form, outlining the nature of the study, responsible contact persons, information regarding confidentiality, benefits of the study, etc., for the protection of human subjects and (2) a self-administered questionnaire regarding demographic information such as age, sex, socioeconomic status, geographic residence, number of children, onset or age of deafness of child at time of diagnosis, etc... After written consent was obtained from research participants all interviews were tape recorded for transcription purposes. It took approximately ten hours to transcribe each taped interview. Reflexive journaling was used to foster maximum validity of research findings.

## Profile of Study Participants

Eleven of fourteen participants identified as African American, one as Afro-Latina, one as Black Hispanic, and one with no response. Four family units consisting of eight participants earned an income over \$55,000; two family units earned between \$45,001 and \$55,000; two family units earned between \$25,001 and \$35,000; and two family units earned between \$15,001 and \$25,000. Two participants received higher than a Master's degree, two received a Master's degree, six received a college education, two completed two years, three received a high school diploma, and one did not have a high school diploma. Participants ranged from 21-60 years of age. Children ranged from age 2 to 17 years of age. Six participants were married, six were single, and two were divorced. Total number of children in the household ranged from one to four children, with an average of 1.6 children per household.

## Data Collection

The one-time, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten families (14 participants) occurred during my dissertation study (Borum, 2001). The primary data collection technique employed in this study entailed in-depth interviewing, which took approximately two hours per interview to complete. This technique, a fundamental technique relied on by researchers engaged in qualitative research, is more like informal, structured conversations than formal, closed-ended interviewing (Bernard, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Rubin and Babbie, 1993;). The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's perspective, but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses (Marshall & Rossman).

Focus questions were established prior to the interviews in an effort to guide the interview process. All questions were open-ended, permitting caretakers/informants the opportunity to share freely their experiences in raising a deaf child. Focus questions or general directions included: What does it mean to be deaf? How do you cope (manage) with the responsibilities of raising a Black deaf child? It is your decision as to what you want to disclose/share, in what depth, and where you begin? This is an assumption fundamental to qualitative research where the social phenomenon of interest unfolds as the research participants view it (Bernard, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Goodwin (1990) states that the analysis of face-to-face interaction provides researchers with an opportunity to study culture, language, and social organization from an integrated perspective. Instead of conceptualizing each of these domains as a distinct and separate field of study, one can look in detail at how each articulates in the production of situated human action (Harrison, 1991; Issac & Michael, 1995; Kelley, 1995; Kershaw, 1998).

Moreover, Thomas and Sillen (1993, p. 153) state that the African American community is rebelling against "proliferating questionnaires and swarming investigators." Consequently, in-depth interviews allow the researcher and participants to participate in research endeavors where information is collected and analyzed in a culturally sensitive manner. Thus, a primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue, in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness, reciprocity, and

immersion, are essential components of the knowledge-validation process. The use of dialogue has deep roots in an enduring African-based oral tradition as well as in African American culture (Collins, 1990; Hamlet, 1998; Schiele, 2000).

### **Data Analysis**

A modified grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Strauss, 1987) along with a poetic prose technique of qualitative analysis was employed. Extracting poetry from qualitative research data is documented in the literature (see Becker, 1999; Poindexter, 2002; Prattis, 1985; Ricci, 2003): However, poetic prose is an innovative, creative strategy for interweaving poetry in an interactive, multi-vocal style in the discovery of emerging, underlying behaviors that have theoretical underpinnings with real world implications (see Borum, 2001).

As a research strategy, poetic prose is designed to capture the complexity and multi-dimensional aspects of African American parents' lives within a social and cultural context. It provides the researcher with the opportunity of providing a framework to enter the lives of African American parents' and convey their perspectives as it relates specifically to negotiating several social entities and contexts, in raising a deaf child of African descent in the U.S. Poetic prose was noted reflexively during interviews as an emerging theme and developed further during the data analysis stage. Empirical data (e.g., excerpts, quotes) interwoven and derived from in-depth interviews create the poetic prose. This interface of spirit and scholarship, theory and muse encourages connection between researcher and participants.

In concurrence with modified grounded theoretical approach of systematic theory building, the investigator deductively organized emerging themes using an Afrocentric theoretical perspective as an explanatory model, to understand common and unique themes. Empirical material (e.g., transcripts) was related inductively and deductively to a relevant review of literature and theoretical (e.g., Afrocentricism) premises indicative of the underlying assumptions of an Afrocentric paradigm.

There is no conflict in using qualitative approaches in both an inductive and deductive manner. As Berg (2001, p. 244) notes, "Central to misconceptions are the notions that grounded theory is an entirely inductive process, that it does not verify findings, and that it somehow molds the data to the theory rather than the reverse." Categories used by researchers utilizing grounded theory approaches can be decided inductively, deductively as well as a combination of both (Strauss, 1987). Inductive and deductive reasoning are not independent of interactions between paradigmatic/theoretical interests—Afrocentricism—and empirical observations, in-depth, thematic interviews (Barker, 1957; Berg, 2001).

### **Afrocentric Personal Accountability**

The movement toward participatory research has been a response to the historical inclination to disregard participants, particularly those of color, as "subjects" in research endeavors (Bernard, 1995; Stanfield, 1994). For example, *member checking* has been used in an effort to foster maximum validity of research findings (Bernard; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Before this research compiled and disseminated her findings, transcripts

were shared with participants for their feedback with regard to the accuracy of information pertaining to their own personal narratives. This approach is referred to as member checking. Gold and Bogo (1992) state that it is critical that research participants are defined in terms they consider meaningful.

Furthermore, new knowledge claims are rarely determined in isolation, but are rather developed through dialogue with other members of a community. According to Kershaw, (1998, p. 35) an Afrocentric researcher (scholar) “must always maintain a dialogical relationship with the subjects.” However, “theories emanate from the specific experiences and cultural perspectives of the theorist” (Schiele, 2000, p. 3). The researcher within the Afrocentric paradigm is then an observer whose interpretations are shaped by a particular cultural, political, and autobiographical standpoint. Thus, personal accountability of the researcher/writer is one of ethics (Cannon, 1988). African Americans who engage in research and literary endeavors must “hold themselves accountable to the *collective values* that underlie Black history and culture” (Cannon, p. 77, italics added).

I am an “inside” member of the African American community and have lived in African American communities all my life: I am not only intellectually aware of cultural nuances, I also live the cultural nuances found in African American culture and experiences. Therefore, I will explicate the following, I am single (never married) and have never given birth, thus I have no children: both decisions are by choice. However, I have worked with families and their deaf children in school and home settings for over ten years. I received my Bachelors degree in Psychology with minors in Biology and Philosophy from Mundelein Women’s College in Chicago. I received my MSW w/concentration in deafness from Gallaudet University, the only Liberal Arts University for deaf and hard of hearing persons in the world. Although I am not deaf, I am fluent in American Sign Language. I received my Ph.D. from the School of Social Work at Howard University, a historically Black University where my dissertation topic focused on African American families with deaf children.

### **Results of Poetic Prose**

An emerging theme stemming from the in-depth, thematic interviews with African American parents with deaf children is the spiritual fortitude of Black families in the Black community bonding across generations and localities. This indigenous theme relating to what constitutes or should constitute a community surfaced specifically as African American parents shared their personal narratives related to the focus question: How do you cope (manage) with the responsibilities of raising a Black deaf child? Afrocentricism, as a conceptual and organizing framework, foreshadows the analysis, both as an emerging theme (inductive) and as a theoretical framework (deductive).

The following excerpts derived from in-depth interviews are offered to illustrate African American parents’ perceptions of an American D/deaf community<sup>1</sup>. Whenever possible, to explicate interpretations presented in the poetic prose, at least two to three independent statements, words, etc. from in-depth interviews have been included (Berg, 2001). Emerging, lucid, and representative themes generated from in-depth interviews and observations are interwoven in an interactive, multi-vocal manner to further facilitate

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Capital “D” refers to culture and/or community, while “d” refers to audiological hearing loss.

anonymity as requested by the participants. This overall method of dissemination facilitates the creation of what Collins (1990, pp. 214-215) refers to as a “multi-vocal text” with an expression of emotionality that allows readers to enter.

To highlight some of the underlying Afrocentric assumptions underlying what constitutes a community, this model of community has been developed to frame deductively the inductive responses generated from the empirical material. In other words, an Afrocentric framework undergirding a definition or perspective of community guides and organizes excerpts. Using such a model grounded in Afrocentric assumptions (e.g., African American cultural values), a community generally has an interest in the following.

### **How Families Manage Their Lives**

And so what I know for myself is that I am refusing to adapt this society’s and culture’s notions of viewing deafness, because deafness in a very Eurocentric way means incompleteness and I see my grandson as complete. Part of what I do is refuse, and I understand that that is an intention that I’m deciding to hold, but I think that what it is doing is creating a space for him to be who he wants to be and to achieve his full potential.

You know, I am fair. I try to be fair and this is a given with all of my children. If my children are wrong, I’ll be the first one to come down on them; but if they are right, I will back them all the way!

### **Curiosity about Families’ Hope**

The problem is that system, that environment, I am a parent of a certain environment and that environment that they have right now will not suffice for what I need for my child to be able to do. The goals that I want him to have and the goals that I have for my child and the ambitions I have for my child’s future...I can only deal with now and now where my son is and the mindset they have is just not enough, not for what I see in my baby.

We have made up a lot of signs for Jesus. I mean we have the Big Jesus (J in semi-full circle), the small J for Jesus (small J signed upwards above head on right side of body) and hallelujah for Jesus (both hands raised while waving and shaking hands).

### **Their Fears**

...So a lot of things the school was doing—a lot of them are the same people. A lot of the people are different now, but a lot of them are the same people and you really have to watch them. And the simple fact that we don’t know what’s going on is really dangerous to the Black kids.

“I don’t think they separated the White families like they separated the Black families.”

The emphasis in deafness is on White deafness and if you are not aware of that then you are doing your child a disservice. If you think that your child is just going to be able to go through without your being there, then I think your child is going to be in trouble. You have to be active and you have to be involved. You have to know what’s going on.

### **Their Defeats**

So what they did was really separate the kids from their families as they were learning to communicate with their kids. Most deaf kids I know would rather be in school rather than being at home. Even now, it has nothing to do with the love they have at home. That’s just where they want to be—that’s their world and, to me, the school encouraged that.

...And, I was trying to explain that to a younger parent that you need to be visible. And she said, “Well, no, I don’t have to do so and so, they know I need this and this. I got the ADA backing me up.” I said, “Okay, I gave you my input, you have to work with it where you see fit.”

A lot of White parents took their children out of school when they stopped basically what was a two-school program: one for Black deaf students where they were *segregated* in their own classes and one for White deaf students where they were *segregated* in their own classes...

The drive of culture comes from Deaf families and Deaf adults...so they thought they were freeing them from their families into the deaf culture. But, they didn’t really want them (African American deaf children) in the Deaf culture! What they wanted was a total change from connecting them to the family...

And, then they started like separating the classes. They started separating the classes! They wanted to form a research class and they wanted practically all the White kids in it and it was open planning and by the time Black parents knew what was going on they had everything in place. And all that chaos and confusion turned a lot of parents off. I don’t think they ever came back to the school and they were once committed parents prior to this chaos!

### **And, Their Victories**

Now part of what I have been really most successful at is refusing to take on other people’s notions of being disabled so that I don’t shut his voice

off. You know, like when we are in church. I don't take on anybody's notions that he is handicapped, because for me he isn't.

...Mommy, mommy sit or 'mommy stand up!'" Telling me to stand up when we are in church, 'Stand up!' And, me understanding that, to me that is a reward in itself. You know, and there might be, and I think God gives gifts, the most important gifts, in little spurts in life basically, and my baby is full of light. I truly believe that.

I want everybody to know that it wasn't just by coincidence this child came in my life. It was because God said, 'Hey, you've been there, done that. It didn't work then and it won't work now, but I'll give you something to fulfill your life...

### **Discussion**

From an Afrocentric perspective, the family is the smallest unit of analysis. If schools (communities) could regain an understanding of a philosophy that actually locates meaning where meaning can genuinely be found (e.g., families, friends, nature, exploration, kindness, love, and service to others), in an interdependent manner, children could be saved from the above experiences of blatant racism (Ani, 1994; Logan, 1996; Taylor Gatto, 1992). For example, a community defined from an Afrocentric perspective constitutes an extended family (Martin & Martin, 1985). Such a community would want to know some of the above aspects of families' lives in how they manage their lives through their fears, their hopes, their defeats, and their victories. This is what a community does for its community members (Logan, 1996; Solomon, 1976).

Artificial communities, then, can be said to be just the opposite of real communities. It's an atmosphere of indifference. Friendships and loyalties are very transient, because when all is said and done, an artificial community is simply another kind of network. The success of such a network operating as a community is measured mechanistically and in an ordinal, hierarchical manner (e.g., hierarchy within the deaf community) (Gilchrist & Stuart, 1991). Competition, trickery, and a push for survival is the hallmark of networks: Therefore, the precision implicated by the ranking of persons is its preferred mode of operandi (Ani, 1994; Taylor Gatto, 1992). Its children and elderly are not fully included because they don't necessarily have anything to trade with, unless, of course, they can help further the common interests of the network, albeit transient. As a result, the continued disconnection of generations will occur (Martin & Martin, 1995).

Although many recognize the positive aspects of networking, many have not recognized its deleterious effects. For example, networks, even the best ones, can drain the vitality from its families and communities alike. Unlike real communities where all persons function as holistically whole persons, networks do not require nor want whole persons; only narrow pieces of persons. Thus, when persons function in networks, they are required to suppress all parts of self with the exception, of course, of all network-interest parts. Although it provides a very disconnected and unnatural way of being, some can get used to this way of functioning (Ani, 1994; Martin & Martin, 1995; Taylor Gatto, 1992).

### Implications of Poetic Pose for Future Research

While the experiences of White American parents of deaf and hard of hearing children are well documented, there is a dearth of information about the experiences of African American parents, whose children represent a large proportion of deaf and hard of hearing children nationwide. For example, children of color, one of the most rapidly increasing groups in the U.S. (Rounds, Weil, & Bishop, 1994), represent a sizable proportion of U.S. deaf children (i.e., 40-45%). African American deaf children comprise the largest minority group (i.e., 20-25%). Chamba, Ahmad et al., (1998) and Steinberg and Davila (1997) state that cultural groups differ in their perceptions and responses to deafness, their experiences in raising a deaf child, and thus their perceptions of American deaf communities.

Poetic prose, an innovative qualitative technique (see Borum, 2001), can provide researchers with a tool for presenting a multi-vocal expression of parents' perceptions of American deaf communities (or lack thereof) in their own words. Poetic prose can thus add tremendously to the literature by providing parents (and researchers), particularly families (and researchers) of color, with an opportunity to tell, write, and read their stories in their own words. Afrocentricity, as an organizing framework, conceptually links African Americans to their unique history, culture, and experiences (Collins, 1990; Sanders, 1995). An Afrocentric poetic prose further complements African American parents' resistance to interlocking systems of oppression by opposing the presumptions of "the established social order," which assumes that they will return to their rightful (read: imposed) place in the hegemonic order (Asante, 1990; Gilkes, 1995).

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### Article Citation

Borum, V. (2005). African American parents' perceptions of an American deaf community: Where's the poetic justice? *The Qualitative Report*, 10(4), 703-717. Retrieved [Insert date], from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR10-4/borum/pdf>