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How does America’s Next Top Model Represent Deafness?
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Assigned in COM 513: Intercultural Media Literacy (Dr. Roslyn Satchel)

Introduction

Most colleges in the State of California offer some form of Hispanic American Studies, African Studies, Native American Studies, Afro-American (Black Studies), European Studies, Islamic Studies, Women’s Studies, etc., yet only one University in the entire state offers Deaf Studies. In fact this list of culture specific majors does not even mention Deaf Studies as an optional major in the entire Country (A2Zcolleges.com, 2015). California State University Northridge is the only University in the state of California that offers Deaf Studies, and prides itself for such. However the fact that attaining a degree in such a field is so difficult it decreases access. In the entire country there are 4,726 colleges and universities yet only 70 of them offer some form of Deaf Studies or Deaf Education. This means that not only is this an uncommon degree but it is not offered in enough places in order to fulfill the need of interpreters, teachers, counselors, doctors, lawyers etc. who truly understand the Deaf community.

Media do not teach, show or explain Deaf culture sufficiently, which leads to group marginalization within society. Deafness is represented in films or television by a frame controlled by production companies instead of incorporating Deaf talent. This limited perspective provides an incorrect view of the Deaf experience. Deafness, and hard of hearing, are classified as disabilities therefore, research on the subject is grouped by medical researchers with physical and mental disabilities. Since diminished hearing does not equate to any intellectual deficiencies the grouping of deafness and hard of hearing with debilitating disabilities creates the perception that members of this group are not capable beings. This phenomenon itself shows how marginalized the Deaf community is, since they are not regarded as “normal” members of society. Barnes (1992) categorizes the characterizations of disabled individuals in film in order to better identify the media frames of disability. Media content producers’ frame people with disabilities to fulfill a victimizing and incapable role within society.

Studying how media content producers represent Deaf culture in general, as well as Nyle as a deaf contestant, gives insight into the framing of deafness. The interactions and relationships that Nyle has with the other contestants offers insight into the current state of deaf representation in the media, since the viewer only has access to what the producers of the show choose to air. This project focuses on how Deafness is represented in the media with a content analysis of the 22nd season of the reality show, Americas Next Top Model (ANTM), that includes it’s first deaf contestant, Nyle DiMarco.

Literature Review

Media primes viewers to perceive and acknowledge deafness as disabling. For example, a study shows that depictions of deaf characters in children’s books portray the deaf characters as unintelligent and physically disabled, instead of as regular people who cannot hear (Molos, Moses and Wolbers, 2012). Studies show that individuals who only see people with disabilities in the media are more likely to have discriminatory perspectives as well as feel uncomfortable when meeting a person with similar disabilities (Farnall, & Smith, 1999). Another study specifically looks at how visual media represents Deaf culture, specifically in relation to music (Darrow & Loomis, 1999). The Darrow and Loomis (1999) article contrasts how hearing students perceive the images versus how deaf students perceive them to find the effects of visual media. A major issue in society regarding deafness is the normative understanding of deafness as a disability, when in fact loss of hearing does not impact intelligence aside from some cognitive challenges.

Minorities and groups are formed to help end oppression and shed light on the struggles of minority groups. This is done in an effort to give a voice to the unheard. Social movements allow for the majority to recognize and hear what others go through on a regular basis. However, when the minority group literally does not have a voice it is oppressed and put aside more than others. The media symbolically annihilates Deaf culture so it is important to analyze how a show like ANTM represents deafness.

Medical vs. Cultural Models

In the United States there are over 36 million individuals with some degree of hearing loss yet only about 500,000 are acculturated into the Deaf community (Fileccia, 2011). Although many people suffer from medical hearing loss, individuals who identify as Deaf make the argument that Deafness is a cultural construct; therefore
negating the medical model (Fileccia, 2011). A part of the reason why the Deaf community does not embrace the medical model of deafness is because so many health care professionals associate deafness with decreased intelligence.

Tension and lack of understanding comes from the competing models of medical, which defines deafness based on deficit theory, and cultural, which views deafness on a spectrum and as a group that people can identify with (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). The medical model focuses on seeing any physical abnormality as debilitating and classifying an individual as deficient. In contrast the cultural model views an individuals identity as something that is socially constructed by culture, which in turn influences identity. A key to Deafness as an identity is that it is not binary, there is a spectrum of acceptance (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). Scholars such as Fileccia (2011) who use the cultural model contend that Deaf (D) refers to an individual with significant hearing loss who is acculturated into the Deaf community. By contrast, deaf (d) refers to an individual with any level of hearing loss and is not acculturated into the Deaf community.

Greater understanding of the societal and cultural aspect of deafness influences a change in how institutions function. For example, a University Interpreter Education Program has students practice classroom skills in the deaf-blind community to have the students fully understand the needs of the community they are wanting to serve (Shaw & Carolyn, 2007). Since educational institutions are the main source of future leaders, Universities that have taken the proper steps to fully include Deaf students are helping reorganize the social framework of deafness. The cultural model present in interpreting programs, also helps to solidify Deafness as a cultural construct (Shaw & Carolyn, 2007).

Historically research and discourse about deafness focuses on the medical model (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). With the sociocultural study of deafness being a relatively new area, the main research areas are the history of the Deaf community, language and linguistic relations (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). Deaf culture and identity became an understood and respected worldwide concept by 1994 yet the first specific terms regarding deafness became popular in 1965. The majority of Deaf cultural research has been done in the U.S., and therefore, the current understanding of Deaf culture is restricted to the American Deaf community (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002).

Between those who are deaf and those who are hearing the main tension is that “Deafness” is not recognized as an independent culture. Deafness is accepted in society based on the media representation, which is oversimplified; therefore a cycle in which the tension of whether Deafness is a culture is constantly in question. For these reasons media representation of deafness perpetuates the widely accepted norm of viewing deafness through the lens of the medical model, which negates cultural and/or social aspects of the members of that group (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002).

**Deaf Culture**

A lot of the normative rhetoric is based on the medical model, which is why the Deaf community differentiates positive and negative rhetoric. It is important to recognize what terminology is deemed offensive by the Deaf community, deaf mute, deaf and dumb, hearing impaired; the only culturally acceptable label for Deaf individuals is Deaf (Fileccia, 2011). Other key terms to understand when talking about the Deaf community are, Deaf of Deaf (DD) which refers to Deaf parents with Deaf offspring and CODA’s who are children of Deaf adults (Fileccia, 2011). Oralism refers to educating deaf students to communicate through speech, lip reading, body language, mimicking mouths, breathing patterns as speech and facial expressions (Flaskerud, 2014). Manualism is educating deaf students to communicate by the use of sign language; and total communication is a combination of oralism and manualism; this is supported by the idea that deaf children should be taught to communicate with all available forms aural, manual and oral (Flaskerud, 2014).

The Deaf community feels that their identity deserves respect as a culture in the same manner as ethnic and racial groups (Flaskerud, 2014). Deafness is a culture with tension and differences like any other culture (Flaskerud, 2014). Within the Deaf community there is tension as to whether it is a culture or community. This is an example of the tensions within the group to embrace a similar identity (Flaskerud, 2014). Deafculture.com shows a chart that compares recognized cultural characteristics and those of Deaf culture (Flaskerud, 2014). This is an important argument because if the Deaf community is recognized as a culture then it deserves the same respect and value that other established cultures are given within society and the media. The main reason why it would help the Deaf community to identify as a culture is for greater political power (Flaskerud, 2014). Subordinate cultural groups have less power so their ability to work together and present themselves as an entity to the dominant culture makes policy change more probable (Flaskerud, 2014). Like all other cultures this would mean compromise from all those involved in an effort to share an identity.

Deafness is created by the experience and context and tends to reflect the way in which Deaf individuals and health care professionals interact (Foss, 2014). The Deaf community expects and deserves the same respect as
every other culture even in the most basic ways. For example in 2012 a three-year old deaf child was asked by his pre-school to change his sign name because it resembled a weapon (Foss, 2014). Yet the Deaf community reacted stating that a person should not be asked to change their name just because it does not translate well. The ACLU stepped in to help the cause and it gained a lot of media attention, which ended with the school retracting their request (Foss, 2014).

Issues like this one discussed are a daily struggle for families with deaf members. The social implications for parents of deaf children are vast, especially in regards to education choices (Roberson & Shaw, 2015). Parents must decide early if they will teach their child American Sign Language (ASL) because just how hearing children need to learn language during their formative years the same applies to the deaf (Roberson & Shaw, 2015). These choices are increasingly challenging to many families who have no prior experience with ASL or Deaf culture; and therefore the representations in the media are important factors in the decision making process. Individuals are highly influenced by the media, and without any prior experience, individuals assume that media representations are realistic depictions. This is why a family who lacks experience with the Deaf community is more likely to view media representations of deafness as normative.

Winsor and Skovdal (2008) look at Deaf bloggers to study the kind of communal discourse and empowerment strategies that are perpetuated by Deaf bloggers. The research shows that there is a high value placed on learning sign language as well as equality. The over 400 blog posts studied focus on the importance of communicating with the use of ASL as well as the continued push for the full inclusion of d/Deaf individuals. The method of empowerment, prominent throughout the discourse is a focus on local community advocacy (Winsor & Skovdal, 2008). The blog posts serve as an information resource in which local events are posted and individuals are encouraged to attend. In the same way political rallies and advocacy events are highly publicized in an effort to encourage the Deaf community to work together for policy change (Winsor & Skovdal, 2008). All of these findings are very important because these blogs and their content have no political figure or social scientist guiding the information or forums; instead it is Deaf individuals taking leadership roles within their communities to help connect people.

Lack of Access

In addition to the complexities of the educational process, the Deaf are also constantly excluded from health campaigns, as well as community outreach programs. Deafness is a unique disability since it hinders the most popular method of communication. Individuals who are deaf face myriad issues daily. For example, inadequate services and translators lead to the misdiagnoses of psychosis (Cabral, Muhr, & Savageau, 2013).

Access is the main reason that it is so difficult for individuals who are deaf to receive appropriate health services (Cabral et al., 2013). Mental health illness, along with hearing loss is a unique case that professionals need proper training to treat effectively (Linn Pettis, 2014). This is a result of a lack of communication between health professionals and the Deaf community (McKee, Schlehofer, & Thew, 2013). As a community the Deaf are cautious about research because historically the Deaf were only included in medical research focused on "curing" deafness (McKee et al., 2013). A way around this is for researchers to be in conversation with the Deaf community so that medical research focuses on the actual needs of the community (McKee et al., 2013).

This specific area of healthcare proves to be difficult because there is a lack of trained individuals from the field who also understand the cultural and societal norms of the Deaf community (Wilson & Schild, 2014). The latest attempt to minimize this inequality has been using video conferencing, or "telehealth". Researchers are testing this system to increase services available to the deaf community, research continues as the social aspects of deafness are further understood (Wilson & Schild, 2014).

The plight of the deaf is not unique to the United States; multiple countries have attempted to resolve the lack of access to the Deaf community. In 1976 in South Africa for example, health professionals started researching the social implications of inadequate resources (Cox et al., 2010). The study found that a specific organization is needed to address the issues; this led to the creation of the South African National Council for the Deaf. This organization focuses on helping individuals find jobs, handle interpersonal relationships and substance abuse (Cox et al., 2010). Although U.S. media represents South Africa’s Deaf accessibility negatively with the critique of the interpreter at the Mandela funeral; the interpreter is using the appropriate local sign language dialect. American media was criticizing from an ignorant standpoint assuming that only American Sign Language is correct. Regardless of American ethnocentrism, South Africa is a great example for how government agencies should recognize deafness and change their communities to allow for equal access (Cox et al., 2010).

Marginalization of the Deaf community within the United States also lies in the lack of emergency preparedness for the deaf and hard of hearing (Engelman et al., 2013). FEMA has a designated Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, that focuses on insuring that individuals with disabilities are not forgotten or ignored
during times of natural disaster (Engelman et al., 2013). However, Engelman et al. (2013) found a total of only 15 training programs in the entire country that focuses on the deaf or hard of hearing. In fact researchers found that the first time in history that ASL interpreters began training as emergency responders was in 2010 in the state of California. A lot of the lack in appropriate access lies in the fact that needs vary because people who are deaf use various types of communication, not just ASL. Another tension comes from the fact that many individuals who are Deaf do not define themselves as disabled, instead as a linguistic minority (Engelman et al., 2013). This proposes an issue because individuals who are Deaf do not necessarily ask for help from disability based organizations (Engelman et al., 2013).

Technology helps to decrease the issues of access due to communication especially within the medical field through the use of translators on monitors and via the internet (Shuler, Mistle, Torrey & Depukut, 2014). The technology however is still not enough to make up for all of the struggles present. Many times doctors do not use interpreters because they think that speaking with family members or gesturing is enough (Shuler et al., 2014). In this case the doctors are assuming that the patients are getting what they need when in reality they are getting what the doctor deems sufficient. Policies such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) helps with the communication barrier by enforcing the use of official interpreters (Shuler et al., 2014).

**Media Representations of Deafness**

Research by Foss (2014) shows that the depiction of deafness in the media has changed dramatically between 1987 and 2013. The main finding is that the medical model is persistent in characters representations as vulnerable, less than human individuals who need cochlear implants as a cure (Foss, 2014). Foss (2014) argues that media that strays from the medical model and encourages tolerance, reinforces Deafness as a culture. Deafness as a disability is continuously primed and framed by the media by its representation of the deaf in news, children’s books, film and television (Foss, 2014). As American Sign Language (ASL) becomes more popular it is seen more in the media. However the appearance of ASL in the media tends to be minimized and incomplete, only showing quick segments of sign language and not entire conversations (Foss, 2014). This study by Foss, (2014) lays out how deafness is talked about and presented in the media by quantifying how often deafness is involved in entertainment media. Foss gathers information on television show topics and deaf actors in order to show, through a table, how deafness in entertainment media has evolved over time. A surprising finding is that not all of the shows use a deaf actor for the part of a deaf person, and those that did define a small community of deaf actors who have that opportunity (Foss, 2014). In the episodes themselves offensive/dehumanizing/over generalizing terms such as handicapped, disadvantaged, and defective are heavily used.

In a counter hegemonic episode the acclaimed show *Switched at Birth* directly deals with the issue of language, stating that children shouldn’t be labeled as having hearing loss, but Deaf gain. This is an effort to re-appropriate the language and use terminology that is positive for families (Foss, 2014). Another finding is that many crime shows include cochlear implants in the discourse, however the cochlear implant is discussed in a purely favorable fashion framing it as a solution to a problem. In reality cochlear implants have many negative side effects, which is why many individuals choose not to use it since ASL and acculturation into the Deaf community have shown more benefits in regards to socialization (Foss, 2014). Essentially the real cultural norms and values of the Deaf community are not usually represented. Positive change over the years shows an increase in tolerance and acceptance for the Deaf as a cultural group.

Publicly televised events such at the Super Bowl include interpreters during the National Anthem and pre-game festivities. However, very few people know this because the interpreter is always placed outside of the televised frame. The highly acclaimed ABC Family show *Switched at Birth* is the first show to make the main characters deaf, however this show did not start airing until 2011 (Weiss, 2011). In a media era in which culture specific media outlets such as MTV, DISH Latino, BET, LOGO Network, etc. all exist it should anger society that it was not until 2011 that a show focused its storyline on the Deaf experience.

The Deaf are represented similarly in international media outlets (Valentine, 2001). For example, in Japanese media the deaf are presented as disabled with the dominant characterization being that of the deaf individual as isolated (Valentine, 2001). In this framework the deaf are also perceived to have a positive stereotype since they are always represented to have significantly advanced traits and characteristics that ‘make up’ for their deafness (Valentine, 2001). Just how Asian Americans are represented as the "model minority," this heroic stereotype of deaf individuals is harmful because it gives a false representation of the real struggles that deaf individuals go through.

Studies show that illustrations in children’s books have a direct influence on how children learn about different cultures; research seeks to see how deafness specifically is represented in children’s books (Golos, Moses, & Wolbers, 2012). The content analysis of 20 children’s picture books find that deafness is represented according to
the medical model in both images and text (Golos et al., 2012). The research shows that deaf characters are not represented from the Deaf cultural perspective but instead from the medical model. Therefore they are represented as "broken" and needing to adapt in order to fit in (Golos et al., 2012).

It is important to recognize how the media represents mental illness since deafness is represented in the media as a symptom of such illness. The media unrealistically depicts mental illness as dangerous and unpredictable, many times connected to crime (Stuart, 2006). This leads to a public perception that the mentally ill should be feared, rejected and ridiculed. The media representations of the mentally ill also have consequences on the patients themselves because it hurts their self esteem (Stuart, 2006). Mental health organizations should lobby for changes in the media, and start using the media as a positive way to bring awareness and spread resources for those suffering with mental illness.

**Media Functions in Regards to Reality TV**

Journalism and traditional print media are not the only forums by which individuals communicate about social norms and politics. Reality television began the new trend of online forums in Britain that spark political conversation based on popular reality television (Graham & Hajru, 2011). This is important because it indicates how individuals communicate and how reality television influences the topics of conversations. Social media has been proven to be an important part of socialization and takes an active role in the creation of reality (Ferrucci, Tandoc, & Duffy, 2014). Studies of University students show that those with high levels of viewing reality television are prone to share problematic information on their Facebook page, such as drinking and sexual behavior (Ferrucci et al., 2014).

Interestingly studies have found that even though participants feel that there is a stigma for those who watch reality television they still watch it in order to be entertained (Lundy, Ruth, & Park, 2008). The importance of this study is that it shows that college students watch reality television because it provides "social affiliation" and a "perceived escapism" (Lundy et al., 2008). In other words reality television allows for a sense of group membership and serves as entertainment. The study by Papacharissi & Mendelson, (2007) reinforces this reasoning by stating that individuals watch reality television for entertainment, and as a pass time. Reality television is valued as something that should be entertaining and relatively easy to follow (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). Individuals with fewer interpersonal interactions were found more likely to watch reality television in an effort to take part in social norms (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007).

It is imperative to recognize that individuals watch reality television not as a form of informational programming but as a passive low-level form of entertainment. This is important because individuals who watch reality television do not tend to critically look at the content they are watching, since it is usually done passively. Research also looks for sub themes within reality television that exist within the viewer mental models (Nabi, 2007). Romance and competitiveness are the main themes by which producers create reality television shows in order to gain popularity and ratings (Nabi, 2007). Therefore, it is important to recognize how Deafness is prominently represented in these main sub themes.

Allen and Mendick, (2012) use cultural analysis in order to identify how television creates social class. The current entertainment trend, especially for teens, is reality television, so it is important to recognize how teens resist or embrace the discourse presented to them in reality television (Allen & Mendick, 2012). The results show that teens reject reality television characters who are perceived as "too authentic" because they would have to construct an identity of working class (Allen & Mendick, 2012). Teens differentiated characters “realness” based on the framework of the show; for example X Factor contestants are not considered as acting whereas Big Brother contestants know they are being recorded and therefore are acting for the camera (Allen & Mendick, 2012). A key finding is how individuals interpret messages from reality television differently. For example, Leona Lewis from X factor is perceived by some as an authentic normal girl, but others see her as pretending to be middle class since the show didn’t show her actual hometown, "the hood," instead it depicted a middle class neighborhood and passed it as her hometown (Allen & Mendick, 2012). In this case the character is perceived negatively by some viewers that know the truth, but the producers, who actually make the decisions are not critiqued, which is an important differentiation (Allen & Mendick, 2012).

**Cultural impact of America’s Next Top Model**

America’s Next Top Model has turned into an international brand that has reality franchises in multiple countries. Cann (2013) uses this as an opportunity to compare how reality television influences various cultures. The comparison of America’s Next Top Model and Germany’s Next Top Model (NTM) shows that media creates very similar notions of nationalism regardless of culture (Cann, 2013). The American NTM franchise shows a tolerance and even embrace of difference, yet “non-American” behavior is regulated. Similarly the German franchise
regulates difference and rewards “white” behavior (Cann, 2013). Reality television is a part of the cultural construction of a nation. A show such as Next Top Model that is adapted to other cultures, still acts as a representation and co creator of national identity (Cann, 2013). Reality television serves as a method to show the masses what “normal” and “national” is (Cann, 2013). This follows the ideology that reality is socially constructed by taking it a step further and stating that a sense of nationalism is also culturally constructed.

This is important because if reality television and ANTM specifically, serve as a co creator of national norms, the way in which a deaf individual is represented is highly influential. Following Canns’ (2013) analysis, reality television serves an important part of culture and the creation of what nations value and consider normative. Therefore, positive representations of deafness equate a positive social perception and vice versa. Due to these findings it is imperative to take a critical viewpoint on the latest ANTM season in which a Deaf individual, has been chosen for the competition. With ANTM being such a large influential franchise the way in which the producers choose to represent him will have a direct influence on how viewers of the show perceive deafness.

Methods

For this study a quantitative content analysis provides data on the communication between Nyle and the other contestants, as well as Nyles overall representational on the show. The measure is frequency because it enables for an exploratory descriptive analysis of how Deafness is represented. Using frequency to quantify the data from the content analysis is the best approach for this exploratory study since it allows for emergent data on the topic without limiting future research. Since the variables of positive and negative language, as well as inclusion and exclusion in the show are predetermined all of the instances found have the same level of value; therefore validating the measure chosen.

Framing Theory is used by studies to analyze media frames in relation to individuals. “Entman (1993) notes that frames have several locations, including the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture” (De Vreese, 2005). In the case of the Deaf community the media not only represents deaf individuals in a certain way, but also excludes them completely from being visible to the viewer in many instances. This is why frames being measured include how many times Nyle is included and excluded from competitive and social aspects of the reality show.

Sample

The sample consists of the 16 total episodes of season 22 episodes of ANTM. Every episode is coded regardless of whether Nyle is still a contestant or not. By looking at each episode, regardless of what contestants are eliminated, the researcher will be able to analyze the way in which the producers of the show have framed Deaf culture and Nyle as a deaf individual. It is important to recognize that the sample is not perfect, because it is considered second hand information, since the producers have edited and chosen what is aired.

Measures

The researcher is the sole coder for this project because of the convenience and the exploratory nature of this initial content analysis. Six overall variable themes were outlined in the codebook as follows (see codebook in Appendix A). (V1) Disability Rhetoric. This is coded within three variables that refer to the use of negative rhetoric about deafness and the overall frequency of deafness being a part of the discourse. (V2) Exclusion of Nyle. Is the only deaf contestant included in all activities, both competitively and not, equally to the rest of the cast? It is important to look for any instances in which Nyle is excluded from a part of the competition, because this will obviously have a direct influence on his ability to win the overall competition.

(V3) Inclusion of Nyle. These variables focus on how often Nyle is included within the social aspect of the competition. (V4) Inclusion of Interpreter. Since the job of an interpreter is too simply interpret without being considered as part of the individuals identity, the frequency of Nyles’ interpreter being on camera is an important measure. (V5) Interpersonal Relationships. This variable is based on normative relationships within reality shows, such as alliances, romantic interests and friendships. Within this theme the amount of times that individuals use sign language will also be measured. Together these variables will show an either positive or negative tendency of those in the show to interact with Nyle. (V6) Negative Interpersonal Relationships. In contrast to the 5th theme these variables will look at the frequency of times when individuals on the show either ignore or treat Nyle in a negative way.

These themes are picked because they allow for an overall analysis of how deafness is framed and represented throughout the season. The measures do not include Nyles’ rhetoric or measures of his self-efficacy because what is aired is not necessarily what happens in real life, but instead what the producers choose to televise.
This is why the measures focus on how the contestants and judges on the show act and react to the addition of a deaf contestant.

Each of the 16 episodes are watched twice to make sure that the researcher codes appropriately. The first time as a source of entertainment and familiarization with the episodes’ events; the second viewing of the episode is strictly for coding purposes, with every display of the variables being counted. The researcher uses the same coding sheet for each episode in order to ensure that the variables are measured equally throughout (see coding sheet in Appendix B).

**Results**

All of the variables are analyzed by comparing the frequencies over the season. The first theme V1.1 Disability Rhetoric displays an overall low frequency. For three of the episodes no disability rhetoric is used at all, which is a good sign. Episode 15 had the most use of marginalizing rhetoric (V.1.1) with 3 instances, which overall is a low frequency. V1.2 measures how many times the judge’s talk about deafness and the highest frequency was 5 times during the final episode. The majority of these instances were during the final runway walk as the judges were trying to let Nyle know he was walking too fast for the music. However, one of the instances also occurred in episode 15 when the photographer stated that Nyle would probably model better without an interpreter because the interpreter gets in the way. This is coded as marginalizing rhetoric because the photographer is more concerned about how many people are on set than Nyles’ need and right to have an interpreter present, whether he uses him/her or not. V1.3 measures how many times the photographer or coach brings up deafness and that also has a very low overall frequency with the most instances being 4 during episode 15. The most important part is that aside from episode 13 none of the judges, photographers, or coaches bring up deafness in a negative way. This is an important finding because it means that even though each episode includes a judging process, the judges do not focus on Nyles’ deafness, instead focus on Nyle as a model and contestant.

![V. 1 Disability Rhetoric](image1)

The second overall theme measures how often Nyle is excluded from the competitive and social aspects of the show. Nyle was excluded from daily life on the show the most during episode 11, with a total of 10 times accounted for; this episode was actually a “deleted scenes” episode. The fact that this episode has a much higher frequency of exclusion brings into question just how much Nyle is embraced by his fellow contestants. Throughout the season Nyle is allowed equal access to all aspects of the competition itself, for example, he always has an interpreter, and the creative director Yu Tsai learns sign language throughout the season in order to communicate with him directly.

![V. 2 Exclusion of Nyle](image2)
The only instance in which Nyle was not given equal access was during a nighttime, all darkness, photo-shoot in episode 13. It was obvious that production had not thought about how they could accommodate Nyle during that photo-shoot. Although this only happened once it is extremely important because the photo-shoots are the main aspects of the overall competition, and the judges all agreed that this was the only photo-shoot that Nyle did poorly in.

![V. 2.1 Unequal access during Competition](image)

The third theme focuses on the inclusion of Nyle by his fellow contestants in group activities and conversations. How much Nyle is included within group activities outside of the competition (V3.1) was fairly consistent throughout with the mean being 2.56 times. Although it is consistent the low mean is observed as a negative result because although their is a low frequency of excluding Nyle, there is also a low frequency of included him. Similarly Nyles’ inclusion within group conversation (V3.2) results in a mean of 3.63 times, which is higher than V3.1, but is still not very inclusive within the overall frequency.

![V. 3 Inclusion of Nyle](image)

The fourth theme is important to analyze because how often the interpreter is included in the frame shows how Nyles’ identity is defined by production. Overall analysis of V4.2 shows that the interpreter is hardly ever seen in daily life, which is positive because it means that Nyle is able to be himself and was not forced to use an interpreter at all times. In contrast, the interpreter was visible throughout the competition aspects of the episodes as measured by V4.1. The analysis shows a progression of more frames in which the interpreter is included as the season goes on. This can be explained by the fact that as more contestants are eliminated each remaining contestant, including Nyle, is given more air time. In the case of Nyle, this also means that there are more opportunities for the interpreter to appear on screen. Although the interpreter appears as many as 26 times within one episode it was obvious that the majority of the time the interpreter just so happened to be within the camera frame. The camera never focuses on the interpreter and although the frequency is high the length of time that the interpreter is seen on camera is minimal.
The fifth variable is used because it looks at very normalized aspects of reality television. By measuring the frequency of variables such as creating alliances and romantic relationships, it serves as another measure for the social inclusion of Nyle within the competition. The first 5 episodes of the season do not include any of these indicators, and although after episode 6 there is an increase, the actual frequencies remain very low, with alliances being created with Nyle only 4 times throughout the entire season. The variables that measure romantic interests and claims of friendship combined have an average frequency of 1.37 times overall.

V5.1 had the largest frequency since it measures how many times sign language is used by anyone on the show who is not deaf, or an interpreter. Although there is a steady increase in sign language usage through the season only 3 episodes include more than 50 instances of sign language. The majority of the episodes have a frequency of below 10 for use of sign language.

Finally the negative interpersonal relationship measures (V.6) have very low frequencies with 7 out of the 16 episodes not including any of these instances at all. Although the ultimate goal is that Nyle would never be made fun of, ignored, or sign language treated as a joke, the fact that the highest frequency is only 3, and only occurred during one episode, gives an overall positive result. The low frequencies within this theme suggest that the
contestants, judges and photographers have positive interpersonal relationships with Nyle and that he is accepted and treated well in general.

![Diagram](image)

**V. 6 Neg. Interpersonal Relationships**

**Discussion**

Overall, the negative representations of deafness are definitely a problem, specifically when fellow competitor Dustin decides to teach Nyle how to “voice” his name. This is problematic because it perpetuates the medical model in which Nyle needs to be fixed and Dustin is somehow helping because once Nyle does voice Dustin’s name, the cast is very excited and triumphant. Another example of how the marginalization of deafness is perpetuated is in the episode during Devin’s birthday, and Devin takes Nyles’ phone from him. Outside of the competition the contestants do not have cell phones, except for Nyle, who uses an app on his phone in order to communicate with his cast mates outside of competition. In the episode Devin takes the cell phone from Nyle in order to take pictures and Nyle is completely ignored by the other contestants and the issue is never truly dealt with on camera. This perpetuates the idea that it is ok to marginalize someone, because Devin is never expected to apologize or even recognize his wrongdoing.

Therefore taking into account all of the variables the overall representational of deafness in ANTM season 22, although far from perfect, is still positive. The most profound and directly positive representational of Deafness came in the final episode when Nyle was named the winner of the competition and Tyra Banks said, “So Nyle, you won ANTM, because you are an amazing model. You have it. You just so happen to be deaf, but that is not why you are ANTM. You kicked a**, so congratulations” (Banks & Dominici, “ANTM” episode 16). The fact that Tyra Banks makes it a point to separate Nyles’ ability to model and his Deafness shows that the show itself made sure to go against the norm and see a Deaf individual as a normal human being. This is supported by these results, which show that throughout the season Nyle was the cast member in charge of the Deaf narrative. Although the producers made decisions of framing deafness, no other cast member was used to define or represent Deaf culture. The focus was always on the competition itself and aside from episode 13; he was never at an overt disadvantage. In fact throughout the season various contestants and judges learn sign language, including one guest judge in episode 14 who only appears once but chooses to use sign language.

Twice throughout the season the competition includes the creation of multi media visuals. During the creation of a music video and commercial Nyle is fully included with all other contestants and performed his lines with sign language. There is no voice over from the interpreter; instead he uses his language, which just happens to be silent. This is also another way that Nyle is able to drive the narrative because he proves that his Deafness is not an inhibitor to his career. Throughout the season the judges Tyra Banks, Miss J. Alexander and Yu Tsai learn sign language and communicate with Nyle in his language more and more, which counters the hegemonic medical model, since the individuals who hold all the power on the show are adapting to his language.

One of the most evident examples of the producer’s choice to represent deafness positively was the format of episode 7. In this episode Nyle wins a weekly competition and as a prize has a Deaf friend from home visit and join him as the cast learns sign language and has dinner in complete silence. This is a decision made by the producers; those in charge of the media frame choose to have a large portion of an episode focus on how important it is that the cast members learn sign language. This frame serves as a counterhegemonic move by the show because it counters the ideology that deafness should be fixed. Instead deafness is treated as another language, that individuals should take the time to learn for the consideration of everyone.

Season 22 of ANTM was far from a perfect representation of Deafness, but it was an important positive step forward. The show not only included a Deaf contestant but also allows him to win based on the fact that he
earns it as a model and not as a charity prize. The results show that the producers of the show allow Nyle to drive his personal narrative throughout the season, which is something that has rarely been seen, since deaf characters within the media are mostly represented as sidekicks, or easily manipulated naïve individuals. As the season progresses and Nyle becomes a strong competitor producers begin to use the narrative to bring awareness about the Deaf community. The fact is that individuals are sitting at home watching ANTM for entertainment, but are also gaining cultural knowledge and tolerance for the Deaf, which is a wonderful outcome of the show.

Taken the results found future research will code for how Nyle influences the Deaf narrative throughout the season. A future rhetorical analysis that could use the unedited footage would allow the researcher to compare the results between what was aired and what was not. Lastly, interviews with the actual producers of the show would give insight as to how Deafness was edited and why certain problematic interactions occurred.

Impact

As was discussed throughout the semester when a group is symbolically annihilated by the media that group ceases to be considered human and valuable. ANTM broke the pattern of the symbolic annihilation of deaf individuals by the media by focusing on Nyle as a person and by allowing him to drive the Deaf narrative. This break in the pattern allows for individuals to humanize deafness and recognize that individuals who are deaf are indeed valuable members of our society.

Overall, ANTM’s Season 22 has accomplished a great thing, the inclusion and humanization of the Deaf community. The social impact of this breakthrough by ANTM does not just influence the general public, but also helps the Deaf community feel pride in their identity. Just how racial minorities are encouraged to see actors who they identify with, so do Deaf individuals hope they can see more deaf actors within mass media. Even though the media has symbolically annihilated deafness for decades, ANTM has become a platform for Nyle to rise as a role model for Deaf individuals and especially Deaf children.

References


Appendix A: Code Book

V1 Disability Rhetoric: This refers to the use of rhetoric that refers to deafness as a disability.

1.1 = use of terms: hearing impaired, deaf-mute, deaf and dumb, disability, disabled, or other (defined by the coder as any term or phrase that demeans deafness

1.2 = judges bring up deafness

1.3 = photographer/coach brings up deafness

V2 Exclusion of Nyle: When the viewer is aware that Nyle is in a room is he part of the conversation?

2.1 = Competition

Whenever Nyle is excluded from an aspect of the competition. Whether that be a photo-shoot, challenge, judging panel, etc.

2.2 = Daily Life

Whenever Nyle is excluded from group activities/conversations.

V3 Inclusion of Nyle: This is from interactions outside of the competition

3.1 = Nyle is included in group activities outside competition

3.2 = Nyle is included in group conversation outside the competition

V4 Inclusion of Interpreter:

4.1 = Competition

Mark how many times the interpreter is included in the visual frame. Whether that be a photo-shoot, challenge, judging panel, etc.

4.2 = Daily Life

Mark how many times the interpreter is included from the visual frame of group activities/conversations.

V5 Interpersonal Relationships:

5.1 = How many times contestants/judges use sign language?

Even the sign language is incorrectly used, how many times the contestants attempt sign language.

5.2 = How many contestants/judges create alliances with Nyle?

5.3 = How many contestants/judges show a romantic interest in Nyle?

5.4 = How many contestants/judges clearly claim a friendship with Nyle?

This would be measured by the use of such words or phrases that would indicate friendship.

V6 Negative Interpersonal Relationships:

6.1 = How many times contestants/judges find sign language humorous?

6.2 = How many times contestants/judges make fun of Nyle?

6.3 = How many times contestants/judges ignore Nyle trying to communicate?
Appendix B: Coding Form

Name of Coder:
Episode Name/Number:

V.1 Disability Rhetoric:
1.1 = use of terms:
1.2 = judges bring up deafness
1.3 = photographer/coach brings up deafness

V.2 Exclusion of Nyle:
2.1 = Competition
2.2 = Daily Life

V.3 Inclusion of Nyle:
3.1 = Nyle is included in group activities outside competition
3.2 = Nyle is included in group conversation outside the competition

V.4 Inclusion of Interpreter:
4.1 = Competition: Mark how many times the interpreter is included in the visual frame.
4.2 = Daily Life: Mark how many times the interpreter is included from the visual frame of group activities/conversations.

V.5 Positive Interpersonal Relationships:
5.1 = use sign language?
5.2 = create alliances?
5.3 = show a romantic interest?
5.4 = claim a friendship?

V.6 Negative Interpersonal Relationships:
6.1 = find sign language humorous
6.2 = make fun of Nyle
6.3 = ignore Nyle trying to communicate