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Rebecca Raphael has been teaching at Texas State University, San Marcos since 1999. She received her PhD from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Her scholarly interests include prophecy, the history of biblical interpretation, poetry, and drama. She is currently working on a book on the representation of disability in the Hebrew Bible.

I have had two teaching careers, one deaf and one hearing. Yes, in that order. I grew up with normal hearing. At fourteen, I developed a mild hearing loss that progressed slowly. From fifteen until cochlear implant surgery at thirty-four, I used hearing aids, lip-reading, and assorted adaptive strategies. When I completed my PhD, I was profoundly deaf. Unlike those who identify with the Deaf World and use American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary language, I experienced hearing loss as just that — a loss. English is my mother tongue. There was no day in my life when I crossed a line from hearing to Deaf and magically learned ASL. There was, however, a summer when I crossed a different line and heard again. Since my results with the cochlear implant are exceptional — one researcher called me “a happy accident” — I want to focus on teaching before I had the implant. It raises more searching questions for academia. E o a ea o ea e i ea.*

When I say that I couldn't hear my students, it doesn't mean that I heard nothing. I could hear voices, especially stress patterns. But speech is more than sound: it's phonemes. Vowels are lower-pitched, louder, and take longer to pronounce. Consonants are higher-pitched, softer, and shorter in pronunciation. The meaning of language lies primarily in the consonants. That's why we have languages with purely consonantal alphabets, but nobody writes only in vowels. With powerful hearing aids, I could hear stress and vowels: Ea, ut o o ea. Can you read that? I was trying to do the auditory equivalent. A classroom sounded like vowel soup. On the first day, I always told my students that I was basically deaf and explained what they would need to do to communicate with me. Still, I understood little to nothing of what my students said. They sounded/looked hesitant, disdainful, receptive, belligerent, confused. I asked for repetitions two, three, four times, and often didn't get it. Some people stopped talking. Others became louder and more persistent. When students talked to each other, I rarely understood any of the

exchange. This was the case every day, in any room, all the time. When I got good teaching evaluations, the classroom still sounded like this. When my chair and I experimented with accommodations, it still sounded like this. When my first scholarly publication was accepted, it still sounded like this. Whether I was in a good mood or a bad one, it sounded like this.

From my first week of teaching, I trawled the Internet for other hard-of-hearing or deaf academics. I found a few people who had quit teaching, but no one who was currently working in academia. I found one or two science PhDs who wanted academic careers, but went into research because schools wouldn't hire them. Even in hard-of-hearing and late-deafened organizations, I didn't find any professors. There aren't many of us. The list-serve "Deaf Academics" has 165 members worldwide, and many of them are graduate students. (Yet deafness does not count under most institutions' diversity initiatives.) It was founded in 2002 and did not exist when I was looking for it.

A long experiment with accommodations followed. First, we tried what worked for me as a student: FM devices. These are personal radio transmitter-receivers. Designed for hearing a single speaker, they maximize residual hearing by delivering sound without background noise and by amplifying the speaker's voice. They do not assume that the hard-of-hearing person will be the one who has to hear thirty people. FMs gave me a small boost, but not much. One day after class, I picked up the table microphone from the other side of the room and noticed that someone had scrawled in pencil: HELLO! I didn't know who the graffitiist was. Out of the deaf.

After two semesters with FMs, I realized that I no longer had enough residual hearing to use them. This epiphany had three effects: I began to explore career changes, to consider a cochlear implant, and to use visual media for classroom communication. My second round of accommodations involved using students in the class to write down what other students said, and, later, hiring an instructional assistant to do this. Note-takers were agonizingly slow and conveyed only part of the communication. There was still a lot going on that I didn't know about. Anna, my Instructor's Assistant (IA), once told me after a class that some of the students were talking and laughing about my failure to hear something. I confronted the class in the next session and told them that talking about a deaf person in his or her presence was similar to a racial slur. Several students were in tears by the end of my speech. I am deaf, ear noig.

I considered learning ASL and using the university's interpreters. But ASL solves the wrong problem. I can't hear students, and *they* don't sign. Further, my audiologist expressed skepticism about mastering a new language in order to use it in such a demanding context. Finally, the staff interpreters are for students. While I would not want to take anything away from

students who need it, the assumption that people with disabilities will not be in the position of authority is institutionalized, self-reinforcing, and illegal. It took me over two years to find someone who knew about the accommodation I needed: CART. The same service and technology by which television is captioned also works on reality. I had one trial with it, a smashing success. It conveys everything; it doesn't impose someone else's judgment about what is and isn't important for me to know. The speed seemed natural to the students. CART providers are trained professionals who must be compensated. Department of Justice guidelines for ADA compliance list it as an effective communication for hard-of-hearing or deaf people. Around the same time I tried CART, I decided to have cochlear implant (CI) surgery and thus didn't need CART by the fall semester. (The medical professionals I consulted did not think that the CI would enable me to hear in a classroom; I chose it for other reasons.) Had my CI results been less spectacular, I would have needed CART to continue as an academic.

These nuts-and-bolts issues affect any deaf professor, but as we all know, religion is special. The Bible uses deafness as a metaphor for spiritual defect. I thought nothing of this until I read these passages before classes of fundamentalist Christians. Did my students see me in these metaphors? Once I asked Anna for her impressions. She told me that students found me intimidating, and deafness amplified the effect. "You seem to know everything, and they say, 'How can she be so smart if she's deaf?'" Apparently one isn't allowed to be both. Anna also said that students felt that my historical-literary approach attacked their faith, that they had to defend it to me, and that my deafness made this harder. This reaction shows a direct application of the biblical imagery, as I suspected. It also attributes their frustrated apologetics to my disability, rather than to my ability to answer arguments. It doesn't even consider that there may be weaknesses in their approach to the text. Finally, this view has historical precedent in early modern belief about deaf people. Without hearing, education was thought to be impossible; and without hearing or reading, one could not receive the Word. We were exempt from evangelization and its purported benefits.

For my part, I felt vulnerable to judgment and abuse, and incompetent as a teacher. After all, I didn't know what students were saying or laughing at, and was never sure that my meticulous responses to questions were even on the point. I couldn't tell if anything was getting across. For me, the biblical images of deafness applied ironically to my students. Nothing I said about historical and cultural context sank into some heads. They just knew what it meant, as effortlessly as hearing people hear. No labor of language-learning or lip-reading for them. *O i bi bu my erat, o dea ike e essee I ed?*

How the CI has changed and not changed my life is a story for a book. For now, I would like to raise the tougher question for my hearing colleagues. I had to ask myself, "Should I leave academics just because I'm deaf?" The ability to communicate in a classroom is essential to teaching. But is communication equivalent to a physical sense? Ask yourself whether your

academic merit would change if you suddenly lost your hearing tomorrow. I don't think it would. So, let's generalize my question to "Should academia exclude deaf people?" I ask this in a provocative form because I hope that your instinctive answer is a resounding *No*. However, a simple feeling on the part of individuals will not, by itself, include deaf people. Concrete actions and policies are necessary. For example, I'm sure no one would say that deaf people should be turned away at the door of the Annual Meeting because of their deafness. However, in 2004, the first year in which the AAR provided any accommodations to deaf people, it consciously chose to provide only ASL and not CART. For me five years ago, this was like having the door closed in my face. Should the door to the classroom also be closed? If not, it must be opened by the understanding that communication and academic merit don't require physical hearing. The hearing academy will have to do something it has not done well before: listen to us.

* *The author kindly provides the equivalent of captioning by supplying the following key to the vowel sentences: in order, Mark 4:9, Is 6:9, Lv 19:14, Ps 38:14, Is 42:19.*

References

John K. Niparko, et al. *Cochlear Implants: Principles and Practices*. New York: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 2000. A hard-core textbook for scientists by some of the leading medical researchers on CIs.

Kathryn Woodcock and Miguel Aguayo. *Deafened People: Adjustment and Support*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000. In my opinion, this is the single best work on the experience of becoming deaf in adulthood, as opposed to being born into the Deaf community.

[Department of Justice Americans with Disabilities Act ADA](#) . Contains a wealth of information about the ADA, guidelines for compliance with it, and remedies available to disabled persons when the act is violated.

Deaf Academics. <http://www.deafacademics.org> . The page and list-serve provides networking for deaf academics and sponsors conferences on the inclusion of Deaf, late-deafened, and hard-of-hearing people in academia.

CART. [A listing of CART providers by state](#) .

