2007

Themes and symbols in ASL poetry: Resistance, affirmation, and liberation

Karen Christie
Dorothy Wilkins

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.rit.edu/article

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact ritscholarworks@rit.edu.
Themes and Symbols in ASL Poetry: Resistance, Affirmation, and Liberation

Karen Christie and Dorothy M. Wilkins

Key words
Analysis of signed poetry, De'VIA works, Post-colonial Literary Theory, Cultural Resistance, Cultural Affirmation, Cultural Liberation

"Much of my work depicts the Deaf experience...the suppression, and the beauty, of Deaf Culture and American Sign Language as I see it..."

Betty G. Miller

Abstract
This paper analyzes themes and symbols in a number of works of poetry in American Sign Language. In particular, the expression of themes of resistance to oppressive elements of the dominant (hearing) culture and affirmation of the values of Deaf American culture will be identified and described in various poetic works. For analysis, definitions of resistance and affirmation are borrowed from Durr and Grcevic (1999) and Durr (1999/2000) who applied these concepts to the works of Deaf artists striving to represent the Deaf experience. Our analysis confirms that there exists a thriving tradition of ASL poetic works which can be described as having themes and symbols of resistance and affirmation. Because a number of poems were found to depict the journey from resistance to affirmation,
a third theme, called liberation, was created. Furthermore, we propose that these poems can be viewed as part of both postcolonial literature literary studies and the basic tenets established by the De’VIA Manifesto. Because of the universality of the Deaf experience across cultures, the poetry of ASL would likely embody themes which hold international relevance for analysis of the signed poetry of Deaf cultures around the world.

Biographies
Dorothy M. Wilkins, MS and Karen Christie, PhD., are research partners in Rochester, New York who were also coordinators of the 1996 ASL Literature Conference (along with Deirdre Schlehofer (“DD’’)). Ms. Wilkins (“DW”), has taught ASL/Deaf Studies to a variety of learners. Dr. Christie (“KC”), has taught English/Literature to Deaf students at NTID and WSSD. Both have taught for over 20 years, yet are still interested in learning new things—particularly about signed poetry outside of the United States.

1.0 Introduction
ASL poetics is still in its formative stages since the groundbreaking scholarship of Clayton Valli began scarcely fifteen years ago (1990; 1993). Valli focused on defining rhyme in ASL by borrowing concepts from the spoken/written language traditions such as repetition of phonemic features. Thus, at it’s simplest; Valli identified the recurrence of similar handshapes, movement paths, locations and facial expressions as poetic rhyme in ASL. Pausing or units of meaning were used to describe the line or stanza breaks (see Ormsby, 1995).

More recently, Heidi Rose (1994) and H-Dirksen L. Bauman (2003) revisited the cinematic nature of ASL literature in performance, an outgrowth of kinetic imagery and visual vernacular of the sign art performance of Gilbert Eastman and Bernard Bragg (as cited in Bauman, 1997; 2003). Bauman, in particular, has asked, “Couldn’t one view ASL poetry as a visual art?” (2003: 36). While his question was intended to lead readers to the relationship between film language and the creation/performance of ASL poetry, our goal will be to look at the relationship between themes found in traditional Deaf fine arts and ASL poetry.

Ormsby (1995), Peters (2000), Sutton-Spence (2001), and Taub (2001) have focused on close analysis of particular ASL/BSL poems and the metaphors and symbols used. These analyses were particularly helpful for guiding our study of themes and symbols in ASL poetry.

1.2 De’VIA Manifesto and Themes in Deaf Artworks
The De’VIA (an acronym meaning DeafView/Image Art) Manifesto (1989) was created by a group of Deaf Artists in order to describe a particular artistic genre or school of thought. These artists recognized that particular artworks created by Deaf people tended to speak directly to “the Deaf experience.” The creation of the De’VIA Manifesto was to validate and recognize these unique works of Deaf Artists. Artwork by Deaf Artists was considered part of the De’VIA genre if it:

“Represent(s) …perceptions based on their Deaf experiences. It uses formal arts elements with the intention of expressing innate cultural or physical Deaf experience. These experiences may include Deaf metaphors, Deaf perspectives, and Deaf insights in relationship with the environment (both the natural world and Deaf cultural environment), spiritual and everyday life” (Miller 1989).

Not all Deaf Artists create De’VIA works, and most Deaf Artists who do also produce works which are not intended to communicate a Deaf-view of life. Durr (1999/2000) took a closer look at the paintings of two Deaf women, Susan Dupor and Betty G. Miller which were identified as De’VIA works. Durr’s comparison and analysis suggested further categorization of works which reflected the experience of resistance to the majority culture or affirmation of one’s own culture. Resistance works were those that “illustrate how disenfranchised group members experience domination by the majority culture, and the art serves as an act of resistance...” (1999/2000: 48). These artworks can be used as political tools and expressions of protest. For example, Durr noted that both Susan Dupor and Betty G. Miller created paintings of their grade school classes with exaggerated mouths to show the emphasis on oralism. The stiff hands indicated the banishment of signing (see Miller’s “Bell School, 1944” and Dupor’s “I Interesting Hamster”).
In contrast, affirmation art “involves members of a disenfranchised group celebrating and highlighting positive aspects of their culture” (Durr, 1999/2000: 48). These artworks celebrate identity, collective history, cultural values and cultural survival of the group. One art piece by Dupor, “Elysium,” shows a small group of Deaf women signing, and sitting by a campfire in the woods under a deep purple starred sky. The work affirms the value of sign language and celebrates the social collectivism of Deaf Women.

1.3 Postcolonial Literary Analysis
Focus on the artworks of the Deaf experience, can be viewed in the context of postcolonial studies which have frequently addressed the literatures of oppressed people (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995, 2005; Harlow 1987; Patke 2006; and Said 1978). Scholars in the field of Deaf studies, in particular the book-length works of Ladd (2003) and Lane (1992), have shown parallels between the historical domination of Deaf peoples and those of people from other postcolonial groups. In general, both have common experiences such as the dominant culture’s control over the means/form of communication, the use of English as the language of cultural propaganda, strategies for silencing and marginalizing, and the attitudes of the dominant culture toward an inferior ‘other.’

A number of recent studies addressing works in ASL literature have borrowed the postcolonial framework (Eddy 2004; Kelstone and Durr 2003). Kelstone and Durr focused on the parallels between the stages of postcolonial people’s experience in moving toward liberation and the evolution of Deaf playwrights in the United States. Eddy looked at similarities among Chicano, African American, and ASL poetry, as postcolonial literatures which she hopes will contribute to recreate a (neo) national literature in the United States.

Byrne (2005) recently analyzed a number of ASL poems which he identified as poems of “cultural resistance “ primarily due to the lack of influence of the dominant culture and the language in these poems. Kennedy and Peterson (1999) who studied ASL poetry along with their Deaf students at the California School for the Deaf at Fremont, noted themes of “poems that deal with ASL as a language and poems which deal with issues within the deaf community” (1999: 68). These studies provided clues for stimulating a further search for themes and symbols in ASL poetry.

1.4 The Present Study
In looking at ASL poetry, our questions include not only whether themes of resistance and affirmation are valid for describing poems of “the Deaf experience” created by Deaf poets, but also if such works can contribute to the understanding of literatures created by postcolonial groups. We began asking about symbols or motifs of resistance and affirmation found in ASL poems. Do they differ from those of from Deaf Visual Artists or from people who have created postcolonial literatures?

To begin, we analyzed the ASL poems found in the published videotapes of noted poets. In particular, we used the “Poetry In Motion” (1990) videotapes focusing on the works of Patrick Graybill, Clayton Valli, and Debbie Rennie. Additionally, we included “ASL Poetry: Selected Works of Clayton Valli” (1995) and Ella Mae Lentz’s collection of poems entitled “The Treasure” (1995). Thus, we had a corpus of fifty-three poems created by four different ASL poets.

In the following sections, we plan to first analyze in depth one poem identified as having the theme of resistance or affirmation, and the symbols used by poets in these poems. This will be followed by a discussion of common sub themes and symbols we have encountered while studying these poetic works in ASL.

2.0 A Look at a Resistance Poem: “Memories: Speech Class” by Patrick Graybill
2.1 Close Reading
The poem, “Memories: Speech Class” by Patrick Graybill (1990) was created as a set of four haiku-type poems focusing on a child’s view of deaf school experiences. To place the poem in a historical context, it is likely that the idea behind the poem came from the poet’s own experiences. In this case, Patrick Graybill was a student from 1945 to 1958 at the Kansas School for the Deaf (KSD). In fact, two poems refer directly KSD (cf. Graybill 1990). This school experience happened at a time when oralism was still the dominant communication philosophy in the classroom. Deaf students were regularly expected to complete ‘speech classes’ as part of their academic requirements. Because of the pauses in the performance of this poem, the poem is clearly meant to be made of three lines or units of meaning, which
are connected. Patrick Graybill, the poet/performer, creates the persona of a Deaf student. A translation of the poem is presented below (see Appendix A for a gloss and linguistic analysis of this poem).

What?! It’s time for speech class again?!
But look I can sign smoothly with all my classmates.
What?! You are punishing me?!
You put one mitten on my right hand . . .
And the other on my left hand . . .
There is a short string that connects these mittens...
I am forbidden to sign, My hands shackled!

In the first “line” of the poem, a Deaf student looks upwards (signaling eye contact with the hearing teacher) and complains about speech class commencing, once again, too soon. While it also may indicate feeling of mundaneness, in the overall context of the poem, we come to understand that this shows the conflict between the linguistic, educational, and social values of the students and teachers. Deaf students may not value speech in the same way that their hearing teachers do. Conversely, the teachers do not likely value the students’ ability to use sign language. The poem alludes to the common feeling that Deaf people experience when we feel we have had to sacrifice knowledge in important academic areas, such as science, history, and math, in order to spend time practicing speech. From the audist’s view, speech is education and practicing speech is clearly a majority culture value that (hearing) administrators have imposed on Deaf children.

In the second line, the student persona in the poem innocently expresses perplexity and protest to the teacher by saying that he doesn’t need speech class because he can communicate just fine. The direction of eye gaze of the student changes, gazng from the teacher to his peers, and he shows he can comfortably express himself in sign with both Deaf and hard of hearing classmates. So, from the student’s point of view, if the goal of speech is communication, he sees no need for speech class.

In the final lines, the persona’s gaze returns to the teacher. He is surprised that he will be punished for signing. Perhaps this student has not yet learned that while signing may be permissible in some school contexts (such as the dormitory), it is not an “acceptable” way to communicate in a speech class. Regardless, in this school context, clearly the only acceptable language is spoken English. The persona then describes his punishment: having mittens that are attached by a thread of yarn forced on his hands. The student, feeling shackled, gazes up at his teacher, completely stuck and suppressed. This silencing of the hands is akin to placing tape over a hearing person’s mouth. The use of mittens is a bit ironic. While they would prevent signing, they are also generally soft and easy to pull apart. Therefore, this may also suggest the soft, benevolent manner in which the underlying violence of suppression occurs. However, the final “photograph” of the poem, the picture that the poet wants you to keep in mind (cf. Graybill 1990), is that of being handcuffed and in shackles. This is what the punishment felt like, what the mittens actually symbolized to him. Clearly, his language and his ‘voice’ are being suppressed and imprisoned. Clearly, the poem communicates how audist educators have relentlessly imposed the value of speech on Deaf children.

2.2 Analysis of the Symbols and Theme of Resistance in the Poem

At the end of the poem, “Memories: Speech Class” the singular symbol is glaringly evident. Mittened hands become hands which are shackled and prevented from using signing. This symbol shows the mental and physical violence of educational practices at the time when the denial of Deaf ‘voice’ happened via suppression of ASL.

In addition, “Memories: Speech Class” is clearly a poem of resistance. As Wilcox (2000) and Taub (2001) pointed out gazing up toward a higher location indicates a more powerful status; in this case, Graybill’s persona gazes up at his teacher. His gaze in the second line toward his peers, lower than that of the teacher, is on an equal plane. The powerful others in the world of Deaf children are educators and the educational system itself which assumes the role of being responsible for educating these Deaf students “for the hearing world” rather than a bi- or multi-cultural world. Thus, this is a poem of resistance because of the contrasting values between those who are in authority in a deaf school and Deaf community members. In describing the student’s point of view, Graybill creates a poem in which resistance is the response to the educational and social goals of assimilation via imposition of the linguistic value of English and speech skills on Deaf children.
3.0 A Look at an Affirmation Poem: “Hands” by Clayton Valli
3.1 Close Reading
The poem “Hands,” by Clayton Valli (1990), is a short lyrical poem which celebrates ASL in the lives of Deaf people. Further, it reinforces the value of hands. Unlike in the resistance poems described above, the hands of the poet/persona in this poem remain unrestrained and free. The following is an English translation of the ASL poem (see Appendix B for a gloss and linguistic analysis of this poem).

What are hands for?
The snow is falling
The flowers are blooming
The grass is swaying
The tree leaves are falling
This whole natural world
With my hands
I express to you.

This poem is a rhetorical question that is answered by the poet in lyrical form. In the first line, the poet/persona presents the question: What are hands for? What is their purpose? In answering this, the poet/persona then describes in the following four lines the natural events connected with the four seasons. The poet organizes each of these natural images in space as if painting images on a canvas (for an artistic rendering of this, see the opening montage of “ASL Poetry: Selected Works of Clayton Valli” 1995). In the last line; the poet begins to link the images to the answer of the question. Thus, the purpose of hands in the poet’s view has something to do with nature, the seasons and fullness of expression. In the same way that nature expresses itself through the seasons, the natural expression of Deaf people flows through their hands—sign language. Because of the graceful fluency of the poem and the repeated rhyming of the movements and handshapes of the signs in the poem, and the accompanying facial expressions, and the balanced use of space (Valli 1990), the poem’s structure and feeling are reminiscent of a haiku with rich strong natural images.

3.2 Analysis of the Symbols and Theme of Affirmation in the Poem
The symbols that Valli uses in the poem, “Hands,” are ones that many poets resort to when describing things of ultimate natural beauty. The symbols of the seasons are typical, such as leaves falling from the trees to indicate the fall season. These symbols from nature, then, indicate that what Deaf people do with their hands (i.e. signing) is a natural, beautiful phenomenon. Not only that, the poet chose the seasons because they suggest consistency in the midst of change. These images suggest an unbroken cycle of everlastingness. The language of Deaf people, who are free to use their hands, is ASL. This language has continued despite the ‘seasons of change’ throughout the history of attitudes toward sign language in American culture. Thus, when the poet asks what are hands for, the answer is for expression using a language that can be as awe-inspiring as any natural wonder.

The poem “Hands” reaffirms a number of Deaf Cultural values such as the personal identity of Deaf people, and our linguistic and social values. Peters’ (2000) analysis of “Hands” notes its communication of the beauty of ASL and the cultural value of hands. By showing ASL to be a natural language, the poem implies that Deaf people are natural beings. The language of Deaf people, ASL, is valorized. Like other languages, ASL has survived while undergoing natural language evolution as well as attempts to eradicate it. This further asserts the importance to Deaf people of the survival of ASL and Deaf culture. The poem carries a firm belief that not only is ASL a living and changing natural language, but it is a language that will endure throughout time.

4.0 A Look at a Liberation Poem: “Black Hole: Color ASL” by Debbie Rennie

Figure One: De’VIA Themes in Selected Works of ASL Poetry

De’VIA

Resistance

Affirmation

Liberation
As we studied affirmation poems in ASL, we came across a particular group of poems which ended affirmatively, yet began with elements of resistance or the feeling of unbelongingness. The opposite was never true. Because we felt this transitional theme from resistance to affirmation appeared in a number of poems, we created a new category we call liberation poems. Liberation poems often describe the process of self-empowerment, and contain early symbols of resistance and later symbols of affirmation. In addition, a number of liberation poems describe how a Deaf person finds her/his home in the deaf community, thus affirming Deaf culture in terms of personal identity as well as its language and social values.

4.1 Close Reading
The poem, “Black Hole: Color ASL” (Rennie 1990) addresses the Deaf experience of many Deaf people from hearing families who must find a way into Deaf culture. Finding their way into the Deaf community occurs when they discover ASL and begins the eventual formation of a Deaf identity. The poem, which appears below is translated by Peters (2000: 67) (see Appendix C for a gloss and linguistic analysis of the poem).

Ladder, rungs, ladder upright
I walk, come to ladder, and climb up
See pots of red paint, yellow, blue, green
Blue skies, dip into paint, splatter paint
Ladder shakes, people shake, I totter
Paint spills, the ladder shaken to dislodge, paint spills
Black hole looms, and I am endangered, paint spills
I flail and stagger, black paint spreads, I flail
Ladder is pulled down, I stagger and flail, struggle
Black looms, black looms, black looms
I fly and soar, colors all over, I fly
Colors all over, I fly, I soar

In this poem, the persona begins an upward climb into the Deaf community. There is some uncertainty as indicated by the persona’s facial expression. Coming upon a platform, bold colors of paint sit in gallon cans. Looking up to a vast blue sky, the persona dips her hands in the various colors of paint and splashes them across the sky. At the same time, her face shows amazement, swelling inspiration and unadulterated free-expression. As she flicks paint into the sky, her hands morph into signing hands. As the title tells us, these colors symbolize ASL and the action of hand painting symbolizes signing. Learning to sign is an important cultural tool for becoming a part of the Deaf community. In addition, Rennie clearly describes the experience of many Deaf people who grew up “oral;” For years, these deaf people have lived unaware that they have the natural potential to be full, creative language users, a potential which is finally unlocked and freed after they are exposed to ASL.

While the persona paints/signs, the ladder shakes. She looks down to where someone stands shaking the bottom of the ladder, beckoning her to come down. As the ladder continues to shake, the colors spill over the top of their cans. In slow motion, only the can of black paint overturns and spills in a huge black puddle near the bottom of the ladder. The person who was shaking the ladder then disappears into the black hole. This black hole becomes a sinkhole, which now gradually pulls the ladder downward. At the top of the ladder, the persona flails her arms, helplessly watching as she moves closer and closer to the abyss.

The beckoning person shaking the ladder symbolizes the dominant culture, which continually reminds Deaf people that “it’s a hearing world.” A short jaunt into the Deaf World is acceptable, but benevolent people often will not allow a deaf person to move on into the Deaf World, only back to the majority culture. It is significant, perhaps, that the moment the painting hands morph into signing hands, the ladder shakes.

While the persona’s arms frantically flail at the top of the shaking ladder, they transform into wings. Rising upward, flying skyward, she becomes submerged into the sky canvas with colors smearing her face. The signs of struggle have left her and she is freed and ecstatic.

4.2 Analysis of the Symbols and Theme of Liberation in the Poem
A number of symbols are used in this poem such as ladders, colors, black holes, and flying. The symbol of a ladder is used to show a way into the Deaf community. Wilcox (2000) notes “up is positive” whereas “down is negative.” So the connotation is that moving up into a higher plane is a
positive development. The paint cans of color represent ASL, in all its richness and suggest the emptiness of English as a language of expression for Deaf people. The morphing of the persona’s hands from painting/splashing to signing clearly reaffirms the value of hands as vessels of language.

The black hole/sinkhole is a negative symbol giving the poem an element of resistance. In addition to that, it is a black hole which contrasts with the colors above. For the Deaf poet, the majority culture is symbolized by a black hole, a sinkhole. A black hole is a terrifying, colorless, and “sightless” place where one cannot see clearly. It pulls one downward, rather than upward. It is like a vacuum suction, a force which must be fought against because it can suck the Deaf-life out of a person. The black hole suggests that for a Deaf person to disappear into the majority culture is to be sentenced to oblivion, which is a stark contrast to the ascending into personal freedom.

This freedom is ultimately symbolized by the persona’s flight. In this final scene, flying symbolizes freedom from the oppressive elements of the majority culture. She internalizes ASL and it becomes a part of her identity. In addition, flying can be said to represent freedom of the spirit, a type of spiritual re-birth from a deaf person into a Deaf person.

Byrne’s (2005) analysis of this poem results in the recognition of the poem as an act of resistance. As we have seen, “Black Hole: Color ASL” is a poem which ultimately affirms Deaf identity, Deaf culture, the Deaf experience and the beauty of ASL. Yet, the poem begins with a journey into the unknown. The uncertainty and fight against the black hole serve as elements of resistance in this poem. Yet, the persona in Rennie’s poem discovers ASL and suggests that ASL has the same value to Deaf people and their self-expression that color has for artists (Peters 2000). The persona takes off into the ASL world of “color” by experiencing the freedom to express herself and this experience is akin to spiritual enlightenment. Thus, the poem is a liberation poem which uses symbols of both resistance and affirmation. This liberation poem describes the journey from resistance to affirmation by describing the Deaf experience of the journey into the Deaf community, the linguistic value of ASL, and the celebration of personal identity fulfillment.

5.0 ASL Resistance Poems: Further Analysis of Themes and Symbols

Table One - Thematic Analysis of ASL Resistance Poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Resistance to Majority Cultural Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Speech Sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poems and Poets</th>
<th>Linguistic</th>
<th>Educational</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Memories: Speech Class&quot; by P. Graybill</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Door&quot; by E. M. Lentz</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Something Not Right&quot; by C. Valli</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Hands Folded&quot; by C. Valli</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Sit and Smile&quot; by C. Valli</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Cave&quot; by C. Valli</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Lone Sturdy Tree&quot; by C. Valli</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I am Ordered Now to Speak&quot; by P. Cook &amp; K. Lerner</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This poem is included for the purpose of discussion related to subthemes in ASL resistance poetry. It is not counted in the corpus of the fifty-three poems we analyzed.

Table One indicates that of the works of ASL poetry we studied, seven poems were identified as resistance poems. In our analysis of these poems, we found a need to set up categories which would describe the primary culture values of the majority (hearing) culture which were felt to challenge particular cultural values of Deaf people. Although Deaf people in America are at least bicultural and share many values common with the dominant culture, these opposing values have been areas of tension. Four subthemes emerged as a result. We found that when creating resistance poems, Deaf poets protested the imposition of the majority cultural values in the realms of language, education, personal identity, and socialization. In addition, these poems form the strongest response to audism, the assumed superiority of hearing people and systematic discriminations against Deaf people.
The linguistic values of the majority culture touch on which language, which modality and which form of communication is rewarded. The language of the majority culture is clearly English which is an oral/aural language. The consequence of this, for many Deaf people, has been recognition of an emphasis on the form of communication at the expense of comprehension and content richness. These values have historically led to the suppression of the language of Deaf Americans (ASL) and the suppression of signs in general.

Mainstreaming has been the primary educational value imposed by the majority culture on Deaf children. As a site of resistance, mainstreaming is viewed as education for the hearing world in which Deaf children are treated like hearing children and educated in the same manner. Thus, mainstreaming is thought of as educational assimilation. Institutionalized audism (Lane 1992), in the educational context is, at its broadest, a hearing-speaking view of the world that is integrated into the school system in curriculum content, pedagogy, informal school contexts and definitions of 'achievement.'

In addition, Deaf poets resisted having a personal identity forced on them that is identified as medical/pathological or monolingual. Identity as a 'deaf' person is viewed by the majority culture as a 'diagnosis' and uses audiological status to determine 'who a person is.' Identity, in this sense, is related to categories based on hearing inability (reported in decibels) such as "profoundly deaf" and "severely deaf." In this way, being deaf is something that is 'treated' like a disease or medical condition, and something which is to be 'overcome.'

The value of deaf people taking on a monolingual identity, which means identity as an English speaking/using person, is one way that the majority culture refuses to acknowledge Deaf people as a cultural group. In addition, it promotes the myth that if Deaf people are exposed to ASL, it will be 'too easy' for them to learn, and thus, will harm their attempts to learn English and speech.

The majority culture's view of the social goal of assimilation reinforces the denial of Deafhood as an identity. A successfully assimilated person is one who "looks" and acts hearing. While social assimilation often is tempting for access to a wealth of opportunities, for Deaf people assimilation carries with it feelings of invisibility and subsequent social isolation.

The following sections describe the seven poems of resistance and how they fit into the subthemes of resistance to the imposition of a particular identity and the majority linguistic, educational, and social values. In addition, a list of the symbols in resistance poems is found in the first column of Table Four.

5.1 Resistance to Imposition of the Linguistic Values of the Majority Culture

5.1.1 Silencing: Hands Restrained

In a great number of resistance poems, the image of hands being restrained in some way is startlingly common. In the poem we described above, the poet Patrick Graybill uses mittens to convey the denial of sign language 'voice.' In "The Door" (1995), Ella Mae Lentz uses the image of deaf people handcuffed to describe the oral era of deaf education in American history. Another ASL poet, Clayton Valli uses the muting of hands in a slightly different way. In two of his resistance poems, "Hands Folded" (1995) and "Sit and Smile" (1995) he uses the inactivity of hands to symbolize oppressive practices which have been internalized.

5.1.2 Mimicking the Oppressor: Puppeting Speech Performance

Another symbol common in ASL resistance poetry, we call "puppeting speech." This is where Deaf people are forced to perform using their voices which often happen in conjunction with the symbol of hands being restrained. In Lentz's "The Door," soldiers...

"...cuffed our hands, strangled us with iron reins.
'Follow me! Line up! Now sit!'
The captain, whip in hand, inflicts his sentence with this command:

Speak!
'Sh...?'
Speak!
'...i...?'
Speak!
'...t?''

(Wilcox 1987)

This image from Lentz reminds one of the final image of hands restrained and mouth opened in Graybill's "Memories: Speech Class."
The "puppeting speech," which is clearly a consequence of years of practice and rote learning, often occurs in the context of a public display. In another poem, "Snowflake" (1990), Clayton Valli enacts a Deaf boy slowly straining to say his name and his age. This action is framed by the boy's father speaking to a group, "As his father holds forth for friends/Proudly he appeals: "Wait, watch this—." At the end of the performance, the father says, "Such improvement! Just look at him!"/Swoons the father contentedly" (translated by Ormsby 1995). In the performance of this poem, the persona uses hesitant and awkward Signed English, exaggerated mouth movements, and facial expressions that indicate memory at work.

In the poetic performance art piece, "Lost Culture" (undated), Peter Cook and Kenny Lerner include a scene in which a young deaf boy is clearly puppeting speech on stage as a demonstration of a teacher's/researcher's success. The young boy, who significantly has small eyes, slowly signs in English and speaks. For just a flash of a moment, his repetitive English signing slips into an emotional ASL sign (glossed: HEART-TOUCH), and the teacher/researcher reacts, enraged. In another poem/performance piece by Cook and Lerner titled "I Am Ordered Now To Speak" (see Davidson 2002), the Deaf poet/persona vocally mimics meaningless phrases from speech lessons at the speech teacher's command.

In all these situations, "puppeting speech" is used sarcastically to communicate the 'miracle' of Deaf children using speech. In "Lost Culture," this is made more ironic by the fact that the boy continues to say "I am happy..." when it is painfully obvious he is not. In fact, the poets make it clear that such linguistic oppression of Deaf children should be resisted.

5.1.3 Exclusion: Closed Doors

In his brief discussion of visual symbolism in arts and literature, Bahan contrasts doors and windows as symbols for Deaf and hearing people. He states that in many Deaf personal narratives "... (there exist) recurrent themes of protagonists being caught, shut in, or locked out behind doors..." (Bahan 2005: 26). This is most readily apparent in Ella Mae Lentz's poem, "The Door," which uses the symbol as the boundary between the Deaf and hearing worlds. In addition, Gil Eastman's poem, "Epic" (1993), uses closed doors as symbols behind which important decisions regarding Deaf people's lives are made by the dominant hearing group. Closed doors, then for Deaf people, communicate impermeability both symbolically and in terms of language perception (Bahan 2005). Because of this, doors are symbols used by Deaf poets to communicate the experience of being excluded and of the lack of access to power.

5.2 Resistance to the Majority Culture Educational Values

Of the eight resistance poems, four have focused on the educational system and the effects of institutionalized audism. Like, "Memories: Speech Class," "The Door" describes the collective educational history of Deaf people from the establishment of Deaf schools in early America up until the mainstreaming movement beginning in the 1970s. In this poem, the opening of the door and venturing out into the hearing community ends with increasingly narrowing halls which eventually crush the Deaf person. This ending of the poem clearly warns against the socially isolating and destructive experience of mainstreaming.

Another poem, titled, "Something Not Right" by Clayton Valli (1990), plays with signs so that the handshape of each sign, which corresponds to a fingerspelled English letter, spells out "Deaf Education Fails." Looking more closely at the signs in the poem, it is clear that the reason it fails is because of the medical view of deaf students as things to be fixed. Another Valli poem, "Hands Folded," addresses the subject of oppression which is internalized by a student after years and years of training at Deaf schools. In this poem, the persona cannot break the habit instilled in him at his deaf school of folding his hands when sitting down to eat. It occurs even years after leaving the deaf school. This poem demonstrates what Padden and Humphries (2005) referred to when discussing not only the linguistic silencing, but also the silencing of the body of Deaf students.

5.3 Resistance to a Hearing Cultural Identity

5.3.1 Ethnic Cleansing: Destruction of Nature

A common symbol, which we later discuss as it relates to poems of affirmation of Deaf cultural values, also appears in resistance poems. This is the symbol of an image from nature such as caves, flowers, snowflakes, or trees, representing Deaf people. In Clayton Valli's poem, "The Cave" (1990), high-technical renovation and public display of a cave parallels a
in a cochlear implant operation. In this way, Valli communicates similarities between two situations in which something natural is destroyed in the name of “progress.” In addition, the two situations are similar in that a Deaf person with a cochlear implant, like the presentation of the “miracle work” done in the cave, becomes an item of public display. The sarcasm of the misguided feelings about “progress” and “technical advances” were clearly communicated with a slight headshake and sigh from the poet/persona.

5.4 Resistance to the Majority Culture Social Values
5.4.1 Assimilation: Symbols of Isolation and Invisibility
In a number of resistance poems, Deaf poets expose the experiences of deaf people who are socially assimilated into the majority culture. The result of such assimilation is isolation as described in poems such as “Sit and Smile” and “Lone Sturdy Tree” (1990) by Clayton Valli.

In “Lone Sturdy Tree,” Clayton Valli describes his experience of working in a community isolated from Deaf people as being analogous to the huge tree in a vast field he passes everyday on the way to work (cf. Valli 1990). In the poem, “Sit and Smile,” Valli focuses on a Deaf person whose only option is literally to “Sit and Smile.” In this poem, a deaf person experiences isolation while attending important life events (family dinners, church services, weddings and funerals). This is a common experience of many deaf children who grow up in hearing families. Thus, the deaf person passively sits and submissively smiles at hearing people in her environment. In this way, the deaf person pacifies those she interacts with and allows them to remain complacent. And in a sense, she becomes invisible. By becoming aware of how she is denying her own feelings for the comfort of others, the deaf person begins the road to self-empowerment. In the poem, the deaf person imagines another course of action: getting up and walking out of these events. She knows that this will not make hearing people happy, but realizes she must value herself first. Because the tone of this imagined action is a bit sarcastic and retaliatory, we know that she is angry for being left out for so long and is just beginning to work toward her own liberation. Thus, sitting and smiling represent submissiveness to the dominant culture. In addition, the poem also uses the image of a deaf person sitting at a family dinner table, asking, “What are they talking about?” to someone. Again, this Deaf experience is that of a deaf person who grew up in a non-signing hearing family.

Resistance poems warn Deaf people what will happen if we are tempted to venture too far into the hearing world (“The Door”). In addition, the warning from “The Cave” is about deaf people who may be seduced by medical experts/technological devices which focus on how being deaf is not an identity, but a medical condition.

Thus, symbols in ASL poems are utilized to describe the internal effects of oppression. These symbols represent our resistance to the imposition of the majority culture’s language, educational goals, medical view of deaf identity, and social values.

6.0 ASL Affirmation Poems: Further Analysis of Themes and Symbols
In Table Two, we present five works of ASL poetry which celebrate and affirm the culture of Deaf people. The affirmation poems analyzed and listed here addressed at least one of the four main categories of cultural values created for analysis of resistance poetry: linguistic, educational, social, and values related to personal identity.

Table Two - Thematic Analysis of ASL Affirmation Poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Affirmation of Deaf Cultural Values</th>
<th>Linguistic</th>
<th>Educational</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL, Hands/Eyes, Visual, Communication</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL, Hands/Eyes, Visual, Communication</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL, Hands/Eyes, Visual, Communication</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL, Hands/Eyes, Visual, Communication</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL, Hands/Eyes, Visual, Communication</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- "Hands" by C. Valli
- "Memories: Kansas School" by P. Graybill
- "Eye Music" by E.M. Lentz
- "Dew on Spiderweb" by C. Valli
- "To A Hearing Mother" by E. M. Lentz

A significant number of ASL affirmation poems are viewed as celebrating Deaf cultural values related to language, modality and communication. The language of the American Deaf community, ASL, is a primary symbol of identity and it is through ASL that we create social bonds and share folklore passed down through
the generations. The fact that our language is visual is one reason Deaf people value the visual modality. However, Deaf people also value a visual way of being in the world and the recognition of a “Deaf way” of visual behavior. Finally, we value our language as a means of communication that enriches us: our creativity, our knowledge, our relationships, and our humanness.

For Deaf people, Deaf schools have been valued primarily as places of cultural transmission. For many Deaf children born to non-Deaf parents, enrollment in a Deaf school is the place where they are first exposed to an accessible and complete language. It is here that they meet Deaf role models, and Deaf peers who become lifelong friends. In addition to educational experiences, Deaf students develop socialization skills for both Deaf and hearing world contexts. For most Deaf people prior to the 1970s, it was at their Deaf school, referred to with a devotion usually reserved for familial relationships, where they developed a sense of who they were.

Having a sense of oneself, as a Deaf person, is also a Deaf cultural value. While many Deaf children who grow up isolated from other Deaf people have been told they were unique and exceptional (cf. Padden and Humphries 2005), identifying one as Deaf is viewed as embracing the shared experiences, language, and history of Deaf people. Thus, Deaf people exhibit pride in asserting a personal identity as a Deaf person, and at the same time, as a member of the social/cultural group.

Deaf people value their social community as another place in which they feel ‘at home.’ In addition to being a place of socialization, a network of social, political, and economic organizations have been set up to address our particular interests and needs (see Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan 1996). Deaf communities have worked together to increase public awareness and break down barriers to jobs, and other activities related to advocacy. As members of Deaf culture, we tend to value the life stories and experiences of Deaf people who came before us, and work collectively to improve the lives of Deaf children—those who will come after us.

Symbols of affirmation and further themes related to affirmation are discussed below. In Table Four, Symbols of affirmation are listed in the second column.

6.1 Affirmation of the Linguistic Values of Deaf Culture

6.1.1 Linguistic Pride: ASL as Beautiful and Priceless
Symbols of ASL in various poems communicate its value to the culture of Deaf people. In “The Treasure” (Lentz 1995), the metaphor of ASL as a treasure of gems indicates something valued and visually beautiful. A similar metaphor is used in Peter Cook and Kenny Lerner’s “Lost Culture.” The treasure chest discovered in this poem includes a candle and a book. The book represents the knowledge of ASL and the candle the vision one needs to understand it. In the poem, the persona protects the book and the candle to the point of death. In the previous discussion of “Black Hole: Color ASL,” language is represented by various rich colors of paints and the fulfillment that can result. As one of the strongest cultural values of Deaf people, poets reserve symbols which communicate visual beauty and reverence for ASL.

6.1.2 Free Expression: Valuing Hands
Unrestrained hands are free to sign and are not silenced. Schertz (1999) recognizes hands as a common motif in the artworks of Deaf people. She states, Take the hand, for instance. In a variety of different forms, the hand appears in many works as a symbol of our pride in our language and its importance as our means of communication (417-8).

In the poem “Hands” (as noted by Peters 2000), the poet directly addresses the value of hands to Deaf people’s lives. Deaf people’s hands not only symbolize linguistic expression, but also a value to be cherished by generations of Deaf people. In addition, Rennie’s “Black Hole: Color ASL” shows the value of hands for both artistic and linguistic expression. In these ways ASL poets reinforce the cultural value of hands for Deaf people.

6.1.3 “Deaf Eyes”: Valuing Deaf Visual Experiences
In a number of affirmation poems, Deaf people celebrate the sensory experience of being visual people. In a 1910-filmed lecture, that continues to be inspirational and highly valued by American Deaf people today, seventh NAD President George Veditz calls Deaf people, “people of the eye.” In addition, various publications such as Journey into the DEAF WORLD (Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan 1996) identify Deaf people as “visual people.” Further, a recent publication by Ben Bahan (2005) was titled, “Memoir Upon the Formation of a Visual Variety of the Human Race,” a sarcastic allusion to Alexander Graham Bell’s treatise “A Memoir Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race,” in which he warned of the propagation of Deaf people.
Valli’s poem, “Dew on Spiderweb” (1995), is a poem which eloquently describes a spider web created across the branches of a tree. Through the predawn moon mist, droplets glow on the spider web’s gossamer threads. Later on, the persona is disappointed in her failure to capture this beautiful image on film. However, the end of the poem clearly states that the experience of the spider web image is taken in through the eyes, stored in the brain, felt in the heart and will never fade. This poem not only relives the visual experience, but also the visual memory of the experience.

Similarly, Ella Mae Lentz’s poem, “Eye Music” (1995) describes the visual pleasure of following the rhythmical passing of telephone poles and wires through the car window as she travels by. She presents the analogy of the sensory experience of visual pleasure as much the same as the aesthetic pleasure that hearing people derive from music. Like “Dew on Spiderweb,” the experience is not truly one that is limited to visual perception, but it yields an appreciation of the Deaf way of being in the world.

6.2 Affirmation of the Educational Values of Deaf People

6.2.1 Deaf School Affiliation: Buildings / Flags

In Patrick Graybill’s short haiku-type poem titled “KSD” (1990), he describes his return to Kansas School for the Deaf after time away with his family. Traveling back to school, he looks ahead until the smoke stack of the school’s power plant comes into view. He then describes the architecture of the power plant with delight at its familiarity. His reaction is clearly one of “coming home” and “pride.”

In the poem, “Epic” Eastman alludes to the historical importance of the Deaf President Now protest for Deaf Americans. The poem begins by describing Washington, DC with a particular emphasis on the Lincoln Memorial and the statue of Abraham Lincoln. This is emphasized because of Lincoln’s place in both Deaf history and American history. In Deaf history, Lincoln signed the charter which supported the creation of the college, later named Gallaudet University. In American history, Lincoln was known as the great emancipator, the president who worked toward freeing African-Americans from slavery. In addition, Eastman describes the protest March from Gallaudet University to the United States Capitol building as an event which alludes to Dr. Martin Luther King’s, “I have a dream” speech in the civil rights march on Washington in the 1960s.

Like the use of flags and banners in Gil Eastman’s “Epic” poem, various symbols of one’s Deaf school or Gallaudet University are often related to feelings of allegiance and loyalty. These symbols serve as connotations of long identity and connection to one’s place of entry into the Deaf community.

6.3 Affirmation of Deaf Identity, Bicultural / Multicultural Enrichment

6.3.1 Claiming our Humanity: Deaf people as a Natural Phenomenon

In ASL poems of affirmation, one primary symbol is that of natural elements to represent ASL and Deaf people. This is in contrast to ASL poems of resistance which highlight the destruction of nature as flowers being torn out at the roots. In the poem, “Hands” (discussed above), we showed that Deaf people’s use of ASL is natural in much the same way as the seasons of the year. In the poems, “Children’s Garden” (1995), “Dandelion” (1990), “Lone Sturdy Tree” (1990), and “To a Hearing Mother” (1995), Deaf poets use flowers and trees to represent Deaf children—both of which need nourishment from the Deaf community.

In “To a Hearing Mother,” Lentz addresses the hearing mother of a Deaf child and urges her cooperation in creating an affirming bicultural Deaf identity for her son. She states, “He is your son, but he is my people.” While the persona urges the hearing mother to work with her to create fertile ground for the child’s development, Eddy’s (2004) analysis suggests that this tension remains unresolved because of the maintenance of distance between the Deaf persona and hearing mother throughout the poem.

In Clayton Valli’s poem, “Deaf World” (1995) a hearing (dominant) world of sound technology is contrasted with the natural Deaf world of rocks, streams, and mountains. In his poem, “Dandelion,” Valli presents Deaf people as dandelions, natural, but viewed as undesirable to hearing people.

6.4 Affirmation of the Social Values of Deaf People

6.4.1 Historical and Cultural Survival: Roots

Ella Mae Lentz’s poem, “Children’s Garden,” tells of the “transplanting” of young Deaf children from a Deaf school to a mainstreamed situation by using individual flowers as symbols of Deaf children. The violence of such transplanting is made clear by the image of these flowers being torn out at the roots. In a similar manner, the “Dandelion,” in Valli’s poem of that title, are torn out by hand and later by a bulldozer. These images speak to the violence of oppression. In fact,
violence carried out upon Deaf bodies is not unfamiliar. For example, there have been historical efforts on the part of hearing people to try to control Deaf people's reproductive rights (see Lane 1995). In addition, Alexander Graham Bell was one of the first proponents of mainstreaming. This, he believed, would lead to deaf-hearing intermarriages and thus, a smaller Deaf population.

The symbol of roots affirms the feelings of sharing a collective history and cultural survival. While many Deaf people do not share a direct common ancestry as other ethnic/minority groups do, we do claim to share common "roots" in our celebration of the past achievements of other Deaf people and our commitment to the future of Deaf children. Thus, Deaf culture serves as a foundation for individual growth and survival of the group.

7.0 ASL Liberation Poems: Further Analysis of Themes and Symbols

Table Three - Thematic Analysis of ASL Liberation Poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Liberation</th>
<th>Linguistic</th>
<th>Educational</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>English</em></td>
<td><em>Mainstreaming</em></td>
<td><em>Medicalization</em></td>
<td><em>Assimilation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>ASL</em></td>
<td><em>Deaf Schools</em></td>
<td><em>of Identity</em></td>
<td><em>Cultural</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Speech</em></td>
<td><em>Intitutionalized</em></td>
<td><em>Def</em></td>
<td><em>Survival</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Hands/Eyes</em></td>
<td><em>Audism</em></td>
<td><em>Monoculturalism</em></td>
<td><em>Individualism</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sound/Vision</em></td>
<td><em>Cultural</em></td>
<td><em>Bicultural</em></td>
<td><em>Historical</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Communication Focus</em></td>
<td><em>Transmission</em></td>
<td><em>Enrichment</em></td>
<td><em>Collectivism</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Form</em></td>
<td><em>Content/Accessibility</em></td>
<td><em>Awareness</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASL Poems and Poets</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Black Hole: Color ASL&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by D. Rennie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Children's Garden&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by E. M. Lentz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Liberation&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by P. Graybill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Deaf World&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by C. Valli</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Cocoon Child&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by C. Valli</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Dogs&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by E. M. Lentz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Treasure&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by E. M. Lentz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Epic&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by G. Eastman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Lost Culture&quot;*</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by P. Cook &amp; K. Lerner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Three shows a thematic analysis of seven ASL poems we have identified under the new category of liberation poems. Initially, these poems were identified as affirmation poems, and in truth, they are affirmation poems. What distinguishes these poems from other affirmation poems is the fact that they often include symbols of resistance and/or a transition in theme from resistance to affirmation. In addition, poems we identified as liberation poems were those which described the 'Deaf experience' of being isolated from the Deaf world, whether by force or by circumstances. Since many Deaf people are born into hearing families who are not aware of the Deaf-World, they often must go through a period of time seeking others who are like themselves. As previously noted, liberation poems often describe a process or experience which changes from resistance to affirmation.

The liberation poems, which addressed the specific area of linguistic transformation, speak to the history of the suppression of ASL. After many years of focus on speech and English language development, a number of Deaf people have been able to recognize and claim ASL as one's own language with feelings of pride. This change in language and communication modality is almost always accompanied by a heightened appreciation of visual experiences and life as a member of the "visual variety of the human race" (cf. Bahan 2004). Traditionally, the language experiences of Deaf people have focused on the form of language for communicative purposes. That is, Deaf children have spent weeks (if not months or years) learning how to awkwardly pronounce and predict via mouth movements a limited number of isolated words—while no time at all may have been spent on explaining the meaning of the words. The content of the information becomes secondary when so much time and energy is expended on struggling to understand or be understood. Because of the completeness of the message via natural signed languages, Deaf people are able to use communication for human purposes such as personal expression, artistic creation, and the building ideas and relationships.

Dominant cultures use the educational system to acculturate oppressed peoples: that is, to promote the norms and values of the dominant culture and eradication of the minority/oppressed culture. Mainstreaming
basically is the education of individual Deaf students in a public school setting, and proponents believe it provides Deaf students with education with their “hearing peers,” and individualized educational program, and a greater access to educational opportunities. However, becoming a liberated student often meant recognizing that closeness to hearing peers and opportunities did not result in meaningful interactions nor participation in those educational opportunities. Lane states “education conducted in a way that negates the child’s identity, fails to use his language, and isolates him from peers is disabling”(1992: 84). The Deaf school offered Deaf students opportunities to be educated with their “Deaf peers” and offered full participation in educational activities. Thus, while mainstreaming perpetuated institutionalized audism, the Deaf school promoted cultural transmission and survival.

The transformation of personal identity for Deaf people is an internal process which is stimulated by external factors. External factors which stimulate such a change usually happen after meeting other Deaf people at a Deaf school or Deaf club. One’s personal identity transforms from an identity which resulted from being told that they have medical problems and are handicapped to an awareness of themselves as Deaf people means they are accepted as normal and whole. Because most Americans use English and most Deaf people come from non-signing families, English, and other languages of our families of origin, are still valued. Language choice for a culturally Deaf person is not the either/or proposition that has been demanded of traditional oral education program.

In liberation poems which describe a transition in social values, the focus becomes on Deaf people as a group. Padden and Osugi (2003) explained that two of the promises of Deaf culture are its provision of a sense of history to Deaf people and the means to advocate for social justice. As members of the Deaf community, we advocate for improved education and opportunities not only for ourselves but to also invest in future generations of Deaf children.

### Table Four - Symbols in ASL Poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbols of Resistance</th>
<th>Symbols of Affirmation</th>
<th>Symbols of Liberation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands Restrained</td>
<td>Hands Valued</td>
<td>Hands becoming Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Memories: Speech Class&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Hands&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Liberation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Door&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Black Hole: Color ASL&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Liberation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Hand Folded&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Liberation&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit and Smile</td>
<td>&quot;Liberation&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberation</td>
<td>&quot;Liberation&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puppeting Speech</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Door&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Hands&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Treasure&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Lost Culture&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;The Treasure&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Lost Culture&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Black Hole: Color ASL&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I Am Ordered Now To Speak&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Eye Music&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols of Audism</td>
<td>Buildings/Fags</td>
<td>Nourishing of Deaf School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| "Something Not Right","Epic" | "Memories: KSD","Epic" | "Cocoon Child"
|                       |                        |                       |
| **Personal Identity** |                        |                       |
| "Needing to be fixed"| Deaf Individual as Natural | Symbols of Identity Transformation |
| "The Cave"            | "Cocoon Child"         | "Cocoon Child"        |
| "Deaf World"          | "To A Hearing Mother"  | "Black Hole: Color ASL"
| "Lost World"          | "Deaf World"           | "Deaf World"          |
| Symbols of Isolation/ Ignorance |                       |                       |
| "Cocoon Child"        | "The Doss"             | "The Doss"            |
| "Black Hole: Color ASL." |                       |                       |
|                       |                        |                       |
| **Social**            |                        |                       |
| Chains of Oppression/ Individualism | Chains of Cultural Ties/Collectivism | Chains of Symbol of Liberation |
| "The Dogs"            | "The Dogs"             | "The Dogs"            |
| Destruction of Nature | Deaf People as a Natural Phenomenon | Regrowth |
| "Dandelion"           | "Dandelion"            | "Dandelion"           |
| "The Children's Garden" | "The Children's Garden" | "The Children's Garden" |
| Symbols of Assimilation/ Isolation |                     |                       |
| "Lone Sturdy Tree"    | "Dandelion"            |                       |
| "The Door"            | "The Children's Garden" |                       |
| "Sit and Smile"       | "The Children's Garden" |                       |
| Stars/Skies:          |                        |                       |
| Oppression/Audism     | Awareness              | Survival              |
| "Epic"                | "Epic"                 | "Epic"                |

* In the chart we organize symbols following the categories of "Personal Identity" and "Social." However, it should be noted that the symbols used by both Deaf and post-colonial poets which describe an experience of a personal/individual is often used to represent the collective group experience (cf. Patte, 2006, Peters, 2000 and Ramazani, 2001).
In Table Four, we summarize the previous discussion of the various symbols used in ASL poems of resistance and affirmation. In addition, we show (in italics) how poems of liberation include symbols of both resistance and affirmation. Below, we provide an in-depth discussion of the symbols and subthemes of liberation poems.

7.1 Linguistic Liberation

7.1.1 Signing Language: Hands Becoming Free

In ASL resistance poems we discovered the common symbol of hands being restrained. Poems with the theme of affirmation, in contrast, showed hands which were open and free. Thus, liberation poems, at times, include the process of hands becoming unrestrained. In Patrick Graybill’s appropriately titled poem, “Liberation” (1990), chained hands are transformed into hands that are ‘free at last’ (Peters 2000) and able to sign. In this particular poem, free hands are also hands that can be shaken, a symbol of negotiation freely undertaken with the majority culture.

7.1.2 Cherishing ASL: A Treasure

In the poems “Lost Culture” (Cook and Lerner undated) and “The Treasure” (Lentz 1995), ASL is described as something of tremendous value, a treasure. In both of these poems, the treasure of ASL has been buried underground, which Taub (2001) notes, represents the majority culture’s attempts to suppress its use. This also alludes to the time in American history when ASL was banned from schools. Despite surviving underground, the treasure is something of great richness and beauty. Both of these poems communicate that Deaf people need to discover ASL for themselves and then safeguard ASL for future generations.

7.2 Educational Liberation

7.2.1 Nourishment of the Deaf School and Deaf Community: Growth

In the poem, “Children’s Garden,” Ella Mae Lentz recreates the Deaf educational history in America from the establishment of Deaf schools to (of the early 1800s) to mainstreaming (beginning in the late 1970s). The poem begins with young Deaf children gathered together in a Deaf school environment where they learn their language from through interactions with other Deaf children. Later, Deaf schools are destroyed, and the children are forced to be mainstreamed as individuals in hearing, public schools. As mentioned earlier, this is portrayed as flowers being cut off at the root and transplanted into ‘less fertile’ ground. In this situation, the isolated Deaf children begin to wither and die. The poem uses colorful flowers to represent Deaf children while common brown plants represent the dominating culture. The destruction of the Deaf schools and the practices of mainstream education are shown to be practices which stun the souls of deaf people. The poem communicates the value of Deaf people being educated together in a setting where they can freely grow linguistically, physically and intellectually. Most importantly, informal Deaf school contexts have been the places where ASL is learned and cultural transmission has taken place. In “Children’s Garden,” the flowers are carefully replanted, tended, and begin to bloom again. Only together can Deaf people experience true growth as students, language users, and people. This poem has the characteristics of a liberation poem because it begins with destruction, yet concludes an affirming belief. This belief is that the seeds of past generations will lead to the ‘re-growth’ of the Deaf schools, and thus, liberation from the practices of violent and oppressive society.

7.3 Identity Transformation

As suggested by the poems we have discussed, when a Deaf person discovers ASL and their ‘home’ in the Deaf community, their personal identity often changes from that of a deaf person with a hearing loss to that of a Deaf person who is a full member of a culture and community. This is reflected most clearly in the poems “Black Hole: Color ASL,” “Deaf World,” and “Cocoon Child” (1990). Valli’s poem, “Cocoon Child” describes this experience as analogous to a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. Like the poem “Black Hole: Color ASL,” the transformation is also one of a flight of freedom. In the poem, “Deaf World,” the persona is aware of the conscious choice he must make between the hearing world of artificially amplified sounds and the Deaf world of natural visual images. The persona in this poem indicates that the Deaf world is “Mine;” that is, he has chosen his identity as a Deaf person.
7.4 Social Liberation

7.4.1 Collectivism and Cultural Survival: Chains

In the liberation poem, "The Dogs" (1995), Ella Mae Lentz uses the symbol of chains as both an element of resistance and affirmation. In the beginning of the poem, two different dogs are described as lashing out at each other as they are chained together. Resistance to each other is created as a response to oppression; that is, horizontal violence is generalized when members of the oppressed group focus their anger on each other. One dog, a Doberman, proclaims itself elite and 'more hearing' than the other, a mutt. Wilcox (2000) has examined the metaphors and metonyms of this poem in depth. In particular, she noted how the poet used the spatial relationships of the two dogs on opposite sides to represent social identity, unity, limitations, and goals. She noted that the chain was a metaphor for "social unity imposed by a state of being deaf" (Wilcox 2000: 175). To state it another way, the chain represents the "chains of oppression," a type of bondage. Yet, these chains also represent the bond of deaf experience/deaf identity, which strongly unite various groups of Deaf people together.

When the poet suggests a mutual understanding between the two dogs, it is the result of a visual experience, a realization that happens when they look into each other's eyes. The change in the view of chains also represents the change in the poem from being a poem of resistance to one of liberation. The chains become a symbol of the affirmation of collectivism and cultural survival. Lentz shows that through understanding, different groups within the deaf community can realize that "chains" also can have a different purpose—they can serve to empower Deaf people. The common experiences bind Deaf people together, and strong cooperation (cf. Wilcox 2000) among different types of deaf people can "free" them in the social and spiritual sense. Thus, the chains are still there, but now these Deaf people feel liberated. The Deaf cultural value of collectivism is affirmed: we are more powerful as a cooperative group than as individuals who fight among ourselves.

7.4.2 Cultural Survival: Regrowth

As we have seen, the cultural survival of Deaf people has depended, in part, upon Deaf schools. It has also depended upon resistance to assimilation and isolation as well as an affirmation of collectivism. In the poems, "The Children's Garden" and "Dandelion" both Lentz and Valli use the images of reseeding for cultural survival. This not only alludes to the experiences of Deaf people of the past, but also to the generations of Deaf people to come. Thus, these poems shift from destruction to rebirth and suggest liberation arising from resistance to the violence of oppression.

7.4.3 Social Awareness: Stars and Skies

In Gilbert Eastman's poem, "Epic," he narrates the story of the Gallaudet University's 1988 Deaf President Now protest. The events of this one week in March were powerfully felt within the Deaf community because not only was the protest successful, but because it led to increased awareness of Deaf people on the part of many hearing Americans. At the beginning of the protest, Eastman portrays the Deaf students' anger at the appointment of a hearing president as reaching up into the night skies, but falling back downward. This indicates the historical experience Deaf people have had when trying to be heard by the majority (hearing) culture. At the appointment of a hearing President and the statement from the President of the Board of Trustees that Deaf people "are not ready to function in a hearing world," stars fall from the skies one by one. As the protest grows, the voices of the Deaf people again reach up into the skies, and this time are broadcast via satellite around the world. After the naming of the first Deaf president at Gallaudet University, alternating stars glow brightly. At the end of the poem, a small plane with a banner flies in the sky communicating back to the students, "The Whole World Salutes You, Gallaudet." Here, finally is acknowledgement that, not only have we been heard, we have been responded to with respect for our struggle. Thus, the poem, "Epic" evokes the events at Gallaudet University which caused Deaf people to be recognized by the dominant culture. Many became aware, for the first time, of Deaf people as a social group and the discrimination we have faced, and the liberating experience of the Deaf President Now! Movement.

The works of a number of ASL poets address the theme of liberation. Most of these poets created their works in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many came of age, as poets, at a time when they could look back to the oral era of education and see the educational, personal, and social impact of
Stokoe’s linguistic analysis of ASL (Stokoe 1965). This research eventually stimulated a collective pride in ASL and confirmation of the belief that poetry could emerge directly from experimenting in ASL. The creation of ASL liberation poems is ultimately hopeful and carries with it a pride in the history of what Deaf people in the United States have faced and overcome.

8.0 Reinterpreting De’VIA and Postcolonialism

8.1 ASL Poems of the ‘Deaf Experience’

Of the fifty-three poems we analyzed, twenty-two were identified as resistance, affirmation or liberation poems. Patrick Graybill’s collection included five poems plus a trilogy. With the final total at eight poems, we determined that one was a resistance poem, one an affirmation poem, and one a poem of liberation. From Debbie Rennie’s videotape, we identified only one affirmation poem out of a total of nine works. Clayton Valli seemed to be the most prolific poet of the Deaf experience. From his “Poetry in Motion” collection, five of his seven poems communicated themes of either affirmation or resistance. In his Collected Works, we found seven out of 20 poems which were De’VIA type poems. Out of Ella Mae Lentz’s collection of 11 poems, we analyzed six. While she produced poems of both affirmation and resistance, she was the poet who created more liberation poems than the other poets. Thus, our analysis of works by Deaf poets clearly shows that a significant number of poems address “the Deaf experience” in ASL poetry.

It is interesting to note that of the poems we studied, most were poems of affirmation or liberation. This is logical because it is most likely that ASL poets create these poems with a particular audience in mind: that of Deaf signing people.

8.2 De’VIA

Durr (1999/2000) noted examples of resistance and affirmation artworks which came out of the Harlem Renaissance and disenfranchised group art movements such as the Chicano/Chicana Art movement and the Native American art movement. However, these movements, and the Harlem Renaissance movement in particular, were also literary movements. For example, the writing and poetry of Langston Hughes contains themes and symbols which express both resistance (e.g., “Dream Deferred”) to the dominant (white) culture and affirmation of the African-American culture (e.g., “Negro”).

The third category of thematic works, liberation, is also relevant for describing some Deaf Visual Artworks. Durr (personal communication) cites Betty G. Miller’s “Suppression” painting as exemplify themes/symbols of resistance and affirmation in the same piece to communicate the transition to liberation. In “Suppression,” we see the mirrored image of a young girl. An ear-shaped object appears in each corner of the painting. However, the young girl appears to be drawn to the middle of the canvas. There, a warm colored-womb-shaped object with a third eye. The young girl’s gaze thus is averted from the ear-shaped object and drawn inward to the third eye.

Additionally, a number of symbols found in ASL poems of resistance, affirmation and liberation are echoed in the De’VIA works of Deaf Artists. In looking at the identified resistance paintings of Betty G. Miller, we focus on those works which may be said to be expressing the subtheme of resistance to the linguistic values of the majority culture. We see the symbol of shackled hands found in Graybill’s previously discussed “Memories: Speech Class” visually echoed in the Miller’s paintings “Ameslan Prohibited” and “Education Deaf” (see www.rit.edu/deafartists for online samples of these works). In addition, the resistance symbol of puppeting speech performance in ASL poems is clearly represented by the puppet-drawn mouths and strings of Miller’s “Bell School 1944,” “Education Deaf” and “English, English.”

Thus, themes and a number of symbols found in De’VIA art are clearly applicable to the analysis of ASL poetry and vice versa. Like the literary works of postcolonial peoples, the De’VIA artist and the ASL poet often create works that express personal experiences, yet also represent the collective experiences of their cultural group. For Deaf people, both fine arts and ASL poetry are visual arts. Deaf poets use ASL to create their literary works in much the same way Deaf artists use paints and clay. By including ASL poetry, De’VIA can be a term which describes the wealth of visual artistic expression of the Deaf experience. In particular, it can be used to describe a Deaf art and literary movement which has occurred in the Deaf community in the United States during the past 20 years or so.
8.3 Postcolonial Literature

We turn to postcolonial literary theory to look for themes and symbols which may be common among the literatures of people’s whose cultures have been systematically oppressed. The history and process of colonialization for these different groups of people have varied greatly, and Partke (2006) notes that the writing/experience of each group has acquired both features unique to itself and features which are shared. What are the features of literary creation that are shared amongst postcolonial peoples? Are the features of themes and symbols we described above for the creation of ASL poetry relevant to postcolonial peoples? As noted previously, the situations of Deaf and postcolonial peoples have been examined at length in the field of Deaf Studies (see Ladd, 2003; and Lane 1995), yet it has not been shown if these similar situations have given rise to shared developments in poetic expression.

From our analysis of the themes and symbols found in ASL poetry, the question that follows is if such an approach is also relevant to the works of postcolonial poets. In an attempt aimed toward formulating an answer, we chose to analyze a number of poems from poets who write in English from the Caribbean.11,12

Postcolonial Resistance Poetry

Postcolonial literary theorists would likely argue that any poem created by postcolonial people, whether in the dominating culture’s language or particularly in their own, would be considered an act of resistance in itself (see Harlow, 1987).13 However, the concept of literary resistance, as illustrated by these acts, can be differentiated from resistance literature (Slemon, 1995). Our analysis has focused on resistance literature in terms of the poetic content: the themes and symbols found in the poems. Differences between literary resistance and resistance literature can be seen in the different analyses of the ASL poem “Black Hole: Color ASL.” While Byrne’s (2005) identifies this poem as a poem of resistance because it resists the influence of English and acts to preserve the minority language (ASL), our analysis identifies it as a liberation poem because of the use of symbols of both resistance and affirmation. When looking at the poetry of postcolonial peoples, analysis of elements of resistance within the works themselves may be relevant for postcolonial literary theorists, and further analysis of the unique subthemes and symbols of a variety cultures would be particularly informative.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2005), Ramazani (2001), Patke (2006) among others have noted number thematic parallels which have been found in the diverse literatures of postcolonial peoples. One theme identified by Ashcroft, et al (2005) was that of “the dominating influence of a foreign culture on the lives of contemporary postcolonial societies” (2005: 27). These works tend to address the violence (either overt or covert) of dominance, and depict behaviors of resistance. Many of the ASL resistance poems described above show personal, linguistic, educational, and social domination by the “foreign” hearing culture of Deaf people’s lives by the majority (hearing) culture akin to psychological and physical captivity or enslavement. Slemon, in particular, presented a definition of ‘resistance literature’ from the field of postcolonial studies as “...that category of literary writing which emerges as an integral part of an organized struggle of resistance for national liberation” (1995: 107).

As an example of postcolonial resistance poetry, we look at a poem created by Jamaican poet, Olive Senior (1941-present), entitled “Colonial Girls School” (from Narain, 2001: 15)

Borrowed images
willed our skins pale
muffled our laughter
lowered our voices
let out our hems
dekinked our hair
denied our sex in gym tunics and bloomers
harnessed our voices to madrigals
and genteel airs
yoked our minds to declensions in Latin
and the language of Shakespeare
Told us nothing about ourselves
There was nothing about us at all.
The poem "Colonial Girls Schools" is not only a resistance poem, but also one which directly and particularly resists the educational system. While Deaf poets resist how the educational system has been created by audists intent on fostering conformity and assimilation, colonizing racists with the same agenda set up the school system Senior describes. In both situations, the desire to erase the differences, of a Deaf or black student, communicates that being white and being hearing are desired. In "Colonial Girls School," kinked hair and dark skin are shown to be symbols of nonwhiteness which need to be "willed" away or "dekinked," and thus, educated into obliteration. The poem is reminiscent of Patrick Graybill's "Memories: Speech Class" where signing is the symbol of 'non-hearing' which contrasts the desired spoken language of the hearing culture.

Senior's poem also shows how the education system imposes one particular set of linguistic, personal, and social values at the expense of another. Jamaican students' voices are "muffled" and "harnessed" in much the same way Deaf students' hands/voices are shackled. Senior shows how the students' bodies are silenced and controlled by the educational system by requiring clothing deemed "appropriate." The last two lines of the poem remind us of Lane's explanation of a "disabling education system." That is, one that serves the goals of the teachers/oppressors rather than the students/colonized.

In addition to Senior's poem, a number of Caribbean poets make use of symbols comparable to those of Deaf poets. Ella Mae Lentz used the symbol of the 'door' to indicate the separation of Deaf and hearing communities in America, and rejection of Deaf people. Likewise, Jamaican/American Claude McKay (1889-1940), describes a door in "White Houses" (from http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/mckay/additionalpoems.htm).

Your door is shut against my tightened face,
And I am sharp as steel with discontent;
But I possess the courage and the grace
To bear my anger proudly and unbent

... 
Oh, I must keep my heart inviolate
Against the potent poison of your hate.

A final example of a symbol used by both Deaf poets and postcolonial poets from the Caribbean is exemplified by the destruction of nature. In ASL poems, dandelions and flowers are torn out at the roots (cf. Valli 1990 and Lentz 1995). Guyanese writer Martin Carter (1927-1997) uses the symbols of "red flowers" and "slender grass" in his poem, "This is the Dark Time My Love" (from www.martincarter.blogspot.com)

Red flowers bend their heads in awful sorrow
This is the Dark Time My Love

... 
Who comes walking in the dark night time?
Whose boots of steel tramps down the slender grass?
It is the man of death my love, the strange invader
Watching you sleep and aiming at your dream.

Here, Carter describes the oppressors/colonizers (the 'strange invader') as those who come under the cover of darkness, haunt dreams, and have "boots of steel." The violence of colonialism is shown by the trampling down of the grass. Whereas manmade boots represent the dominating peoples, the natural image of slender grass is the Guyanese—the people of the land.

8.3.2 Postcolonial Affirmation Poetry

One of the earliest discussions of postcolonial literature arose from the Negritude literary movement. This movement, founded by Arnie' Cesaire of Martinique in the 1930s, focused on the poetry of Africa and African diasporas. Though today there exist criticisms of the Negritude movement, these poets were said to "affirm black personality and redefine the collective experience of blacks "to describe...the black experience and a passionate praise of the black race..." (http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/negritude.html). Such poetry would neatly fit into our category of affirmation poetry.

While Claude McKay grew up in the Caribbean, he has been identified most often as a poet of the American Harlem Renaissance. In his poem, "My Mother" (from Rampersand 2006: 338), McKay's quiet celebration of his homeland can be seen as an affirmation of his people and his culture. Once again, the poet borrows symbols from nature.
The dawn departs, the morning is begun,
The Trades come whispering from off the seas,
The fields of corn are golden in the sun,
The dark-brown tassels fluttering in the breeze;
The bell is sounding and children pass,
Fog leaping, skipping, shouting, laughing shrill,
Down the red road, over the pasture-grass,
Up to the schoolhouse crumbling on the hill.
The older folk are at their peaceful toil,
Some pulling up weeds, some plucking corn,
And others breaking up the sun-baked soil.
Float, faintly scented breeze at early morn,
Over the earth where mortals sow and reap——
Beneath its breast my mother lies asleep.

This pastoral celebration of his island home appears to describe a time after the colonists have left. This is the early, beginning “morning” time. The “crumbling” schoolhouse may represent the dismantling of an educational system set up by colonialists, and now joyously attended. The weeds may also be remnants of the past, with the “breaking up” of the soil a symbol of preparation—the possibility of cultural rebirth. At the same time, McKay affirms the island as his motherland—a place of roots and ancestors, at least in the spiritual sense.

While Senior’s poem above demonstrates the colonist desire to dekink the hair of Afro-Caribbean students, other poets celebrate black hair as symbol of affirmation. One is poet Lucinda Roy’s (1956-present) “If You Know Black Hair” (Busby 1992: 897). While born in England, Ray is connected to the Caribbean via her Jamaican father.

If you know, you really know black hair
...then you know
that there is nothing softer sweeter tougher
than black hair...
Look at how it struggles against the comb
Reasserting itself...

So when my mother smiles at my son’s effervescence hair, and when I smile too seeing bubbles brownly crown his head
we are rejoicing in the thing my father gave
my son, a kind of indomitability.
May it cling to his head like memory.
May hands that touch it feel the soft of strength.

Roy’s poem shows how black hair symbolizes both softness/sweetness and toughness/indomitability. It further suggests that the colonists of Senior’s poem didn’t really know black hair beyond the desire to make it conform to the standards of white hair. In addition, the poem shows how black hair represents a pride in a distinguishing and god-given inherited feature of the culture. This affirmation in turn one of both identity and cultural survival. The ending of the poem is almost like a benediction—one which hopes for the child to remember his heritage and have pride in it, the other is a hope for the child that he/his hair will be truly known and appreciated.

One of the earliest postcolonial women poets from the Caribbean is Una Marson (1905-65) Marson also uses the symbol of black hair in her poems as expressions of both resistance to oppression and affirmation of self. In “Little Brown Girl” (DeCaires 2001: 23), Marson ends her poem with an affirmation in the strength of Black women.

Black girl—what a burden—
But your shoulders
Are broad.
Black girl—what a burden—
But your courage is strong—
Black girl your burden
Will fall from your shoulders
For there is love
In your soul
And a song
In your heart.
While this part of the poem uses third person pronouns such as “you,” it is clear that the poem is addressed to young black women from a black woman. The poem promises (with some initial irony) an end to life burdens and an insistent belief, that as an outgrowth of their struggles black women’s abilities to be strong, courageous, loving, and jubilant will become evident. The poem is thus affirmation of the perseverance of Caribbean women and their ability to foster cultural/historical survival.

8.3.3 Postcolonial Liberation Poetry

In addition, Ashcroft et al (2005) identified the theme of “celebration of the struggle towards independence in the community and individual” (2005: 26). This theme is what we have called the theme of liberation. However, for this to fit our liberation framework, the work would need to begin with a description of the struggle and end with a celebration of progress. Related to the category of liberation, postcolonial liberation poetry appears to include other subthemes of transformation: that of journeying/voyaging and the quest of home (Ashcroft et al., 2005; Boehmer 2005; and Patke 2006).

Barbadian poet and literary theorist Edward Kamau Brathwaite (1930-present) is one of the best-known writers to come out of the Caribbean. His lengthy poem, Jou’vert is excerpted below as an example of liberation poetry (from Brathwaite 1967: 267).

This poem shows a transition from symbols of resistance to affirmation. The poem speaks of a time when homes were shattered, the land was burnt, and the hearts of the people were hurt and bitter. Recognition of such injustices, which allude to life under colonialization, is stated using symbols of resistance. However, much like “Black Hole: Color ASL” and “Cocoon Child,” a metamorphosis, truly more of a resurrection (as indicated by the “Lent-en morning), of sorts is suggested at the end of the poem. Thus, we can see that when those who have been oppressed “awake” and are able to watch/hear/make, they are then able to reconstruct their torn past into a new future. How they are able to do this relies heavily on “their rhythms.” Earlier in the poem, the poet includes vocal drum rhythms in two-line stanzas: “bambalula bambalai/bambalalaa bambalulai.” These stanzas are repeated five times throughout the poem. Drumming is also suggested by the poem’s short lines and repetitive rhyming schemes, and suggests a carnivalesque ritual (Dash 1979). The significance of drumming and rhythms come, not from the colonizing nation, but from the culture of the island’s people—and their lineage with ancestors in West Africa. The poem illustrates the transitional nature of a liberation poem: a place where lashing out in anger and indignation happens and we eventually arrive at a new place of “transcendental, humanist overcoming” (Boehmer 2005: 258).

Another poem by Brathwaite, “Homecoming” (1973: 177-78), shows how symbols of resistance may be reinterpreted as a people become liberated. In this poem, the persona is returning home and “The jaws of the shackles,/clanking bulldog,/grapple the starved ankles.” Clearly, these shackles are imposed by the experience of colonialism. However, later in the poem, the shackles are mentioned again: “Shackles shackles shackles/are my peace, are my home, /are my evening song….” Like the transformation of the symbol of the chains Ella Mae Lentz’s poem, “The Dogs,” Brathwaite transforms the symbol of shackles into “a joyous masquerade of self-affirmation” (Brown 1978). Another Jamaican poet, Christine Craig (1943-present) uses the symbol of a chain to represent lineage in her liberation poem, “The Chain” (Busby 1992: 555).
to compost up their strength,
kept it hidden...

It must be known now how that silent legacy
nourished and infused such a line,
such a close linked chain
to hold us until we could speak
until we could speak out....

The symbol of chains, for Jamaican writers, necessarily alludes to the chains of their ancestors who were forced from Africa into slavery in the Caribbean. Yet, in Craig’s liberation poem, the chains serve as symbols of cultural survival. The poem’s affirmation of black womanhood and perseverance is similar to that found in Marson’s poem, “Little Black Girl.” The poem is also a liberation poem because of the triumph of vocal assertion over silencing.

While Deaf people have never existed as an independent nation, we could be considered a Diaspora by focusing on the particular shared characteristics of people who are dispersed around the globe. And while the longing for a homeland is something many Deaf people desire (see Lane 1995), we share with postcolonial peoples the feeling of being ‘not at home’ in our own countries. Thus, both Deaf people and many postcolonial peoples have needed to create a place called home in the midst of a dominating culture (see Christie and Wilkins, in press, for further analysis of ASL poems of ‘coming home’ and a discussion of Deaf people and a search for home).

8.3.4 Postcolonial Poetry: Summary
The analysis above shows that a number of poetic works from a particular culture which had been under postcolonial rule can be said to possess themes of resistance, affirmation, and liberation. Additionally, the poems indicate that these poets from the West Indies have resisted domination of their language, education, identity, and social/cultural lives. Themes and symbols of affirmation, particularly affirmation of identity and celebration of one’s cultural roots, have also been found. For postcolonial poets, the theme of liberation is pervasive. There is a persistent need to show that from the struggles and wounds of the past a people can transform or metamorphose themselves, giving birth to a free, liberated people.

Finally, our analysis of ASL poems of resistance, affirmation and liberation suggest similarities with other identified structural features found across postcolonial literatures (Ashcroft et al 2005; Ramazani 2001) such as the use of allegory (“Children’s Garden”), irony (“Snowflake”), and magical realism (“Black Hole: Color ASL”).

9.0 Conclusion with International Implications
The poets of American Sign Language create visual works that can be described as incorporating themes and symbols of resistance, affirmation and liberation. The artistic use of language to express emotions related to cultural oppression and cultural pride is common to many postcolonial people and to the literature of American Deaf Culture as well. Taken along with studies by Durr, this analysis has shown that there are themes that are common to the works of Deaf artists and poets. Furthermore, the findings suggest that De’VIA is a movement that can encompass both art works and visual literary works.

While resistance and affirmation art works have been shown as appearing in Deaf fine arts internationally (Baird 2005; Durr personal communication), there are hints that this is also true for signed poetry. In a study of Dorothy Miles’ poems in British Sign Language (Sutton-Spence 2005), Miles’ works such as “The Staircase: An Allegory” is suggested as being a work of liberation. One available poem by Wim Emmerik, a Deaf poet from the Netherlands, “Groei/Growth” (2004) is an affirmation poem which celebrates the naturalness of Deaf people. As Deaf signers across the world are empowered by the recognition of their languages and cultures, more Deaf poets are certain to arise who will create poems, which may bring new symbols to the common experiences of resistance, affirmation and liberation.
References


Acknowledgements
We would like to express our appreciation to Dr. Clayton Valli and Dr. Patrick Graybill for encouraging and inspiring our work. We are also grateful to the discussions and review from our dear colleagues, Dr. Betsy Hicks McDonald, Patti Durr, and Dr. Virginia Swisher.

Footnotes
1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at The Deaf Way II Conference in Washington DC.
2. From http://bettigee-purple-swirl.com
3. While we did not contest the poets' identification of their individual works as "poetry," we did exclude two works from Ella Mae Lentz's collection ("Travels with Malz" and "Malz: The Next Generation") given that the poems were created in English.
4. In addition to the fifty three poems from the above named collections, we include three other works of ASL poetry to reinforce our discussions of themes and symbols: "Epic" (1993) by Gilbert Eastman and two poetic performance art creations by Peter Cook and Kenny Lerner ("I am Ordered Now to Speak [Davidson, 2002] and "Lost Culture" [undated]).
5. The "translations" of ASL poems into English print that appear here we regard as primarily descriptions of the content of the poem. They do not represent a poetic translation into English utilizing poetic features of the languages.
6. Humphries first used the term, audism, in 1975 to mean, "the notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears" (as cited in Bauman 2004: 240). Thus, an audist is a person who believes in the inherent superiority of hearing people over Deaf people and behaves in ways which work to perpetuate such a belief.
7. While such an approach does create binaries which have been criticized in analysis of postcolonial literatures, we agree with Ramazani (2001) that there is a need to acknowledge such a framework in order to be sensitive to the linguistic, editorial, social divisions inflicted on oppressed (Deaf) people by the dominant (hearing) culture.
8. In a discussion on the complexities of the meaning of the term, audism, Bauman (2000 as cited in Bauman 2004: 245) include "a metaphorical orient that links human identity with speech."
9. Padden and Humphries (2005) have recently addressed Deaf Americans' ambivalent attitudes toward Deaf schools. For the purposes of our analysis, we have focused on the traditional cultural value of Deaf schools as places of enculturation into the Deaf community, particularly though informal school contexts.
10. Clayton Valli's "Selected Works" included twenty-one poems. However, since poems "Hands" appeared on both videotapes, we only counted it once under his earlier "Poets in Motion" collection.
11. Although most of the poems we use here appear in standard English, we recognize that a great number of West Indian writers and poets have appropriated English to the use of creole speech patterns, with some African, Caribbean, and Arawak influences. In addition, a variety of oral and performative modes of creole poetry have emerged which demonstrate cultural value for the African oral literary tradition and the visual and auditory power of live performance. It would be interesting to analyze these poetic performances in comparison with the poetic performances in ASL.
12. In addition, we selected poems of poets who have experienced periods of both colonialization and decolonization.
13. Deaf scholar Andrew Byrne (2005) has further suggested that the act of stying as poetry is another form of resistance.
14. In addition to Wole Soyinka's criticisms found in the above-mentioned websites, Boehm states that this movement celebrated "all that had been identified as negative and inferior by the colonizers, gave "spirituality to degrading stereotypes" and made "cultural capital out of their own othering" (2005: 101).