Excerpted from:

**"How Pathological and Cultural Views of Deafness
Affect Service-Delivery Programs"**

by Dr. Susan M. Mather, Gallaudet Research Institute

Overview

In this presentation, I will first discuss pathological and cultural views of deafness. Then I will discuss how these views affect service delivery programs such as library services . . . Finally, I will make some recommendations concerning how to deal with the issues.

I. Pathological and Cultural Views of Deafness

First, I will discuss the two views of deafness. In 1988, Chris Wixtrom described these views in an outline entitled, "Two views of deafness." The first view defines deafness as a pathological condition, which differentiates Deaf people from normal hearing people. In other words, Deaf people are abnormal - not normal.
The second view - the cultural view - defines deafness as merely a difference, a characteristic that distinguishes Deaf people from hearing people. Deaf people are members of a linguistic and cultural minority. In other words, Deaf people are normal.
Let me use Wixtrom's outline describing pathological and cultural views. She lists several examples for these views. First, under the pathological view, a person would deny, downplay, or hide evidence of deafness. Under the cultural view, a person would openly acknowledge deafness. Second, the pathological view emphasizes the use of hearing aids or focuses on speech, while the cultural view gives much attention to the issues of communication access for Deaf people through visual devices and services. Third, with the pathological perspective, a person would regard professional involvement with Deaf people as "helping the Deaf" to "overcome their handicap" and to "live in the hearing world." With the cultural perspective, a person would regard professional involvement with Deaf people as "working with Deaf people" to "provide access to the same rights and privileges that hearing people enjoy."

II. How the Two Views Affect Service-Delivery Programs

I have found some evidence that shows how these two views affect the service-delivery programs in one way or another. I would like to focus on . . . A) library services . . .

A. Library services

1. Adult books
When I was preparing my presentation for this meeting, I went to a library to look

for books related to deafness. I got a list of all the books that are available at the library. There are 1539 books in total. Out of this number, 1327 books support the pathological view. For example, we have books that address the following subjects:

   a) Cures for deafness
   b) Your hearing and your health
   c) The effects of dental drill noise on the hearing
   d) Common diseases of the ear, nose, and throat
   e) Psychology of Deafness.

On the other hand, we have about 212 books that view deafness as a difference. For instance, we have books dealing with:

   a) Deaf culture
   b) Deaf heritage
   c) American Sign Language

What kind of messages would a person receive upon finding this list of books at the library?

2. Children's books
   When I asked a librarian for books for children who want to know about Deaf people, the librarian told me that there is "no appropriate book" for deaf children. The books she collected for me are not even appropriate for hearing children, because they do not emphasize what Deaf people experience differently. The librarian explained that she has 13 books about Deaf children in the children's library. Twelve of them focus on hearing loss and hearing aids. I have the books here for you to take a look at after this presentation. What kind of messages would children get when they want to borrow a book from the library about Deaf children?

[. . .]

III. Recommendations

   What should we do about the pathological view that is prevalent in these services? I have some recommendations.

A. For library services, I recommend that you obtain a copy of the *Red Notebook* from the National Association of the Deaf. It is an excellent resource book on how to get your library to carry appropriate books about Deaf people.

<center>Reprinted with permission.</center>

Mather, S.M. (1992). How pathological and cultural views of deafness affect service-delivery programs. In J. Cebe (Ed.), Deaf Studies: What's up? (pp. 21-29). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University, College for Continuing Education.