NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY: A POSTSTRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF
THREE DEAF WOMEN'S LIFE STORIES

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the influence of hearing loss on identity. Phrased in constructionist terms, the research questions guiding this study were how do culturally Deaf women perceive the influence of hearing loss as they construct their identities? And how do they incorporate, resist, and/or reject various cultural discourses as they go about the creative act of constructing their identities? The participants were three adult women with prelingual hearing losses. All three participants were raised in hearing-oriented environments where auditory/oral communication was used and as adults identified as culturally Deaf. A collaborative narrative method was used and in-depth interviews that elicited life stories were conducted with the participants. Sign language was used during the interviews. The interviews were videotaped, then interpreted to spoken English by the researcher, and then subsequently transcribed. The research interviews provided rich, descriptive data that were used to create a narrative summary of each participant's life story. The researcher collaborated with each participant around the representation of her life story in narrative form. The narrative summaries illustrate the complex, textured, and multilayered ways in which each of the participants constructed identity in their life stories, where identities competed, co-existed, and overlapped. In addition, drawing on poststructural ideas the researcher analyzed four cultural discourses at work in the participants' narratives: discourses of normalcy, discourses of difference, discourses of passing, and Deaf cultural discourses. It was found that a binary relationship existed between discourses of normalcy and discourses of difference leading to the construction of identities based on opposites. These identities were positioned in a binary relationship where one side of the binary was privileged and the opposite was "othered", e.g., hearing/deaf, and Deaf/deaf. However, the poststructural narrative analysis demonstrated that these categories were not fixed, but rather, that hearing status was a complex, unstable identity category, reflecting shifting identities and positionalities. The findings are discussed in relation to empirical literature on deafness and identity. The study concludes with suggestions for professionals, with a discussion of methodological implications, and with a discussion of future research possibilities.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Sam Supalla once described his childhood friendship with a hearing girl who lived next door. As Sam's story went, he never lacked for playmates; he was born into a Deaf family with several Deaf older brothers. As his interest turned to the world outside his family, he noticed a girl next door who seemed to be about his age. After a few tentative encounters, they became friends. She was a satisfactory playmate, but there was the problem of her "strangeness." He could not talk to her as he could with his older brothers and his parents. She seemed to have extreme difficulty with even the simplest or crudest gestures. After a few futile attempts to converse, he gave up and instead pointed when he wanted something or simply dragged her along with him if he wanted to go somewhere. He wondered what strange affliction his friend had, but since they had developed a way to interact with each other, he was content to accommodate her peculiar needs.

One day, Sam remembers vividly, he finally understood that his friend was indeed odd. They were playing in her home, when suddenly her mother walked up to them and animatedly began to move her mouth. As if by magic, the girl picked up the dollhouse and moved it to another place. Sam was mystified and went home to ask his mother about exactly what kind of affliction the girl next door had. His mother explained that she was HEARING and because of this did not know how to SIGN; instead she and her mother TALK, they move their mouths to communicate with each other. Sam then asked if this girl and her family were the only ones "like that." His mother explained that no, in fact, nearly everyone else was like the neighbors. It was his own family that was unusual. It was a memorable moment for Sam. He remembers thinking how curious the girl next door was, and if she was HEARING, how curious HEARING people were (Padden & Humphries, 1988, p. 15 – 16).

The preceding story affords a glimpse into the experience of a Deaf[1] boy learning about difference and about others. Sam's narrative suggests that this episode taught him that there are "others" – those who live around him and his family are now called HEARING, and

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, lowercase "deaf" will refer to audiological hearing loss and uppercase "Deaf" will refer to deaf individuals who identify themselves as culturally Deaf, that is, members of the deaf linguistic and cultural minority group.

they are the majority. How has learning that there are others different from himself and his family influence the way Sam constructs his identity, that is, who he is and how he relates to others with whom he lives? How does he go about making meaning of living with a hearing loss? These questions are at the heart of this study, which explored the intersection of the concepts deafness and identity.

'Identity' and 'self' are complex and complicated concepts. My own views are informed by a postmodern narrative view of identity and self. This view assumes that we constitute our selves and identities in the stories we tell. 'Self' is a dynamic, multifaceted process with no end point. We are constantly revising, re-storying our selves/identities. The activity of constructing narrative identities, therefore, is hermeneutic in nature as individuals construct meaning of their lived experiences and construct a narrative about who they are, both to themselves and with whom they interact.

Based on this view, I believe that language and culture play a central role in how individuals go about the activity of constructing identities. This is not to imply that we are merely text or cultural discourses, but, rather, that cultural representations and language are tools with which we construct meaning of lived reality. For example, Sam's narrative illustrates how the introduction to the linguistic symbols HEARING, SIGN and TALK, represented new discourses for Sam to draw on as he makes meaning of hearing loss in relation to his identity. How does access to these discourses influence Sam's own identity construction? Drawing on insights from poststructuralism and the importance poststructuralism places on discourse, I set out to explore how hearing loss influenced how three culturally Deaf women[2] constructed their identities in the life-stories they shared with me.

Exploration of the Problem

Fifteen years ago, I began volunteering at a Canadian school for the deaf. This began a personal journey of learning from Deaf people. Prior to meeting Deaf people and embarking on the course of learning about Deaf culture and American Sign Language

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[2] My rationale for the number of participants and the decision to interview culturally Deaf women is outlined in Chapter four, in my discussion of the methods used in the present study.

(ASL)[3], hearing was merely a physiological condition enabling me to hear sounds and spoken language. However, upon meeting Deaf people for whom hearing was a social construct bestowing privilege, I was confronted with a new hearing identity and the power and privilege this conferred to me. I began to confront my assumptions about Deaf people and the ways I had constructed meanings of deafness. I was introduced to a different way of understanding hearing loss – hearing loss as merely a physically different way of being in the world.

Since the first experience of volunteer work at a provincial school for the deaf, I have worked in various capacities in the Deaf community. Primarily, I have worked for agencies that have emphasized the importance of American Sign Language and the value of Deaf culture to deaf and hard of hearing children and their families. For example I worked as a residential counsellor at E.C. Drury School for the Deaf in Ontario which was one of the first Canadian Provincial Schools for the Deaf to formally implement a bilingual/bicultural educational philosophy. Since that time I have worked in settings where a commitment to Deaf cultural practices was emphasized while recognizing the immense diversity of deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind individuals and the importance of respecting the unique needs and interests of all clients. For example, I worked as a community mental health worker for a Provincial mental health team serving deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind individuals and their families. In this position I worked with individuals from diverse backgrounds who had varied communication preferences and/or needs and varied linguistic, cultural, and political allegiances. However, I believe it was my work in the area of early intervention, working with families of newly diagnosed deaf and hard of hearing children that inspired my current research interests. As I worked with families and learned about the challenges confronting deaf and hard of hearing children, I became curious about how living as a deaf person – physically different from the majority – affects how one understands herself[4]. My ongoing professional involvement and personal relationships with deaf people contributed to my research interest: exploring the influence of hearing loss on identity and subjectivity.

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[3] American Sign Language is a language with its own grammar and syntax. It is not a universal system. Numerous Sign Languages exist internationally, usually demarcated by national boundaries (e.g. British Sign Language, French Sign Language, German Sign Language) In North America, American Sign Language is the dominant sign language; however, the dominant sign language of Quebec is La Langue des Signes Quebecoise.
[4] Ongoing debate surrounds the use of masculine and feminine pronouns in scholarly writing. I have chosen to use female pronouns for this paper for two reasons. First, I situate myself as a feminist and want to emphasize the experiences of women. Second, the participants I interviewed are female.

Traditionally, social scientists have sought to identify universal theories of identity formation. However, "in the wake of postmodernist – including poststructuralist, feminist, queer, and critical race theory – critiques" (Richardson, 2000, p. 929), the philosophical premise of an objective, universal truth is contested and deconstructed. Instead, postmodern scholars (e.g., Butler, 1990; Collins, 1990; Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Gergen, 1999; Harroway, 1988; Mishler, 1999; Richardson, 1997; 2000) argued that knowledge is selective, partial, local and historical. Researchers are called upon to undertake knowledge program that explore situated and diverse human experiences. Mishler (1999) argued that rather than suppressing variability in the pursuit of universal theories, we should embrace a curiosity about human difference and how difference affects our paths in the process of human living. The present study, exploring the influence of hearing loss on identity and self, focuses on human difference. Living in the world as a deaf or hard of hearing person provides a different situatedness in which individuals construct their identities. It is my hope that the current study, situated within a postmodern paradigm, will contribute to our understandings of human diversity by highlighting culturally Deaf women's narratives of identities.

Deafness is a complicated issue, replete with historical controversies where conflicting ways of understanding deafness compete for recognition as 'truth.' The meaning of deafness, however, is not transparent. As with other physical differences that are commonly construed as disabilities, deafness does not carry inherent meaning (Baynton, 1996). It is constituted and knowable only through interpretive activities (Good, 1996).

From a poststructural perspective this "culturally created web of meaning" is the discourses available in our cultures, that is, the set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that produce a particular understanding of an event, person, or experience (Burr, 1995). Surrounding any phenomenon, there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the object in question, a different way of representing it to the world (Burr). This is the case with deafness. How do deaf individuals incorporate and/or resist the various representations of deafness available to them as they construct their identities? Do they create and incorporate new representations of hearing loss as they navigate identity construction?

Historically, two dominant constructions of deafness have permeated the sociocultural contexts where deaf people live their lives: 'deafness as affliction' and 'deafness as difference.' These are two of the possible ways of constructing meaning of hearing loss. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The following section presents a description of these two predominant discourses, followed by a discussion of the possible implications of these discourses on how individuals construct identities.

'Deafness as Affliction' and 'Deafness as Difference'

An overview of deafness reveals a cultural hegemony where representations of hearing loss fashioned by hearing individuals dominate the symbolic systems, structures and practices of our society (Harmon, 1997; Lane, 1984, 1992). The majority of individuals experience the world around them as hearing people. Hearing is assumed 'normal'. It is what ethnolinguists call an "unmarked category" (Murphy, 1987). Hearing people take for granted that such a physical way of being in the world is normal; therefore, an individual who does not hear must be abnormal or defective (Davis, 1995). To apply such an "infirmity model" to people who are deaf is to regard them and interact with them with respect to our cultural conception of the normal body (Lane, 1992).

Humans use metaphor to understand things, especially those of which we have no direct experience, and metaphor is, therefore, utilized by hearing people to understand deafness (Baynton, 1993). The most persistent images of deafness produced by hearing people are: isolated, impaired, dependent, excluded, and afflicted (Lane, 1992). These images, however, are projections and reflect the values and standards of the dominant culture, not necessarily the experiences of deaf people (Lane). These sorts of projections are something that we can all do to each other, but "the process is often not symmetrical, because one group of people has more power than another to call itself the paradigm of humanity and to make the world suit its own needs and validate its own experiences" (Wendell, 1996, p. 61). In fact, historically hearing people have been in "positions of power to make, on the basis of their metaphors – usually unaware that they are metaphors – decisions with profound and lasting effects on deaf people" (Baynton, 1993, p. 143). To view deaf people based on images of infirmity and affliction guide certain ways of being or managing hearing loss (Baynton).

Deafness as Affliction: A Biomedical Construction

Images of deaf people as afflicted or impaired find their roots in biomedical discourse. Discourses bring different aspects of a phenomenon into focus, raise different issues for consideration, and have different implications for what we should do (Burr, 1995). Biomedicine employs a mechanistic metaphor of the human body. The body, a machine, can be broken down into different parts for repair. Hearing loss, represented this way, is interpreted as a broken body part, a defect inherent to the individual's body. It is an undesirable, unwanted physical impairment whose effects should be ameliorated. For example, in a study on professionals' beliefs regarding educational philosophy, one participant supporting exclusive auditory/oral methods[5] stated about hearing loss, "Deafness isn't a disability? Well, of course it is – that should be minimized. Well, from my point of view, if you were having a child, would you prefer it to be deaf or hearing? It's obvious" (quoted in Hole, 1994, p. 67). Interventions aim to fix the impairment and replicate the normal hearing person as closely as possible.

A criticism of the biomedical model is that it defines certain physical differences (e.g., hearing loss) as problems residing in the individual's body. The meaning of the physical differences is stripped of sociocultural contexts (Bickenbach, 1993). To attribute infirmity is to imply the existence of another state that is more desirable. This act of reducing the problem to physiological malfunction and attributing abnormality embodies an evaluative ranking (Bickenbach, 1993). Furthermore, it assumes that a transcultural and ahistorical 'normal' human body exists. This assumption, however, ignores the subjective and interpretive issue of what normality actually is (Hole, 1994). The activity of defining hearing loss as a physical problem of the individual's body fails to recognize the situational and cultural relativity of normalcy. As Lane (1992) argued,

> if a physical condition is widespread enough in a community and does not interfere substantially with the community achieving its goals, it will be seen as an illness only by outsiders with a different frame of reference and different goals (p. 210).

Increasingly, feminist and disability studies scholars (e.g., Martin, 1997; Wendell, 1996) are providing critiques of biomedicine and its subsequent propensity to medicalize the

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[5] Numerous views exist as to the 'best' method of communication to use with deaf and hard of hearing children. The auditory/oral method proposes that a central goal of education for deaf and hard of hearing children should be teaching the children to speak and lipread without any form of manual communication (e.g., sign language).

human body. Biomedicine has, however, made positive contributions to humanity (e.g., the development of vaccinations to cure disease, hearing aides for deafened[6] adults or deaf adults who prefer auditory/oral communication, and important diagnostic procedures). The prominence of biomedical interpretations of differences, however, creates a hegemonic context where alternative meanings struggle to compete for legitimacy. Alternative views of deafness exist, such as deafness as difference. This next section will discuss this alternative view of deafness.

Deafness as Difference: A Sociocultural Construction

Deafness as difference finds its foundation in a sociocultural interpretation of hearing loss. From this perspective, hearing loss is merely a physiological difference and is not attributed negative value. In fact, from a Deaf cultural perspective, hearing loss is valued (Padden & Humphries, 1988). Deaf people do not want to be fixed; rather, they want to be respected as a linguistic, cultural minority and treated equally in relation to the hearing majority. Proponents of this position advocate co-existence and integration, not assimilation (Hole, 1994).

Deaf individuals who identify themselves as culturally Deaf have their own languages, and in North America they are American Sign Language and la Langue des Signes Quebecoise. Deaf people also have norms and values that are ascribed to their culture, including the importance of residential school ties, the high value of a Deaf identity, group loyalty, and the value of marrying within one's minority group. "Deaf culture is a source and site of [political activism] and acts as an extremely important source of support and information for Deaf people" (Skelton & Valentine, 2003, p. 453).

The sociocultural claims of the Deaf community counter the negative valuation ascribed to hearing loss by infirmity discourses and reconstruct hearing loss as simply another human trait that contributes to a valuable cultural diversity among humanity. These discourses provide another way for Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing[7] people to make meaning of hearing status when constructing identities. However, constructions of deafness as affliction have held positions of prominence and authority. Discourses are not simply

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[6] The term 'deafened adult' refers to the person who was born hearing and acquired a hearing loss later in life.
[7] It is my belief that as hearing individuals are exposed to Deaf cultural discourses, they are confronted with new discourses that may influence how hearing individuals construct selves. For example, they may begin to incorporate a new hearing identity that had remained formerly unexamined.

abstract ideas, ways of talking about, and representing phenomena. Discourses are intimately tied with the practices and structures of society where some representations are privileged and receive the stamp of 'truth' (Burr, 1995). The discourses of biomedicine have saturated the contexts where deaf people live their lives. Lane (1992) convincingly argued that the social welfare, medical, paramedical and educational institutions connected with serving deaf individuals privilege infirmity discourses. Deaf cultural discourses, therefore, have provided a politically valuable challenge to the hegemony of biomedical discourses and have called for a critical examination of relations of power.

Discussion

The above-mentioned constructions of hearing loss, namely deafness as affliction and deafness as difference, are the two most prominent discourses permeating the sociocultural contexts where deaf people live their lives. In the current study I am interested in exploring how deafness influences the construction of identity. The research is situated within a poststructural narrative paradigm that adopts the position that individuals construct identities by drawing on the discourses available to them in the language practices of society. Identities may compete, intersect, coexist, contradict and/or overlap. If individuals draw on available discourses when constructing identities, how do deaf individuals incorporate, resist and/or reject the various representations of hearing loss as they go about the creative act of constructing their identities? Are there nuances to the ways in which deaf individuals respond to these discourses as they construct their identities? This leads to my research question.

Research Question

"How does living in the world as a deaf individual influence identity?" Phrased in constructionist terms and situated within a poststructural narrative paradigm, I ask, "How do Deaf[8] women perceive the influence of hearing loss as they construct their identities in the narratives they tell? How do they incorporate, resist and/or reject various cultural discourses as they go about the creative act of constructing their identities?"

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[8] Regardless of differing degrees of hearing loss, as adults, the participants invoked the political identity marker of Deaf, that is an identity as culturally Deaf. This is illustrated in the narrative summaries in chapter 5 of this present study. In an effort to respect and honour their self-identification I will use Deaf to refer to the participants in this study.

Purpose of This Study

Positioned in a poststructural narrative paradigm, identities are constructed in the narratives we tell. Narratives offer a precious record of individuals' identities. A goal of this study, therefore, was to explore the life-stories of Deaf women to see how hearing loss influenced the way they constructed their respective identities. The participants' narratives provide insights into the experience of living with a hearing loss, enhancing our knowledge about deafness, identity and discourses. I also critically examined how cultural tales available in our society are at work in the stories the women shared with me. I explored the ways particular discourses of deafness have shaped, defined, and/or limited the possible ways of constituting self and how these discourses coexist, contradict, compete, and overlap. Third, this research also accomplished a de-centring practice - placing the experiences of the Deaf women at the centre of exploration. Like feminist scholars (e.g., Cuomo & Hall, 1999) who are committed to exploring the ways whiteness remains uncontested and privileged, I also include an exploration of my "hearingness," with the hope of de-centring this unmarked category. As Elizabeth Spelman challenged,

> it is the nature of white [hearing] privilege to find ever deeper places to hide. If the feminist attempt to deal with "difference" means simply the attempt to include the lives and concerns of some women without seriously challenging white [hearing] middle-class privilege, then all the talk in the world about "difference" is simply dangerous. Tolerance is easy if those asked to express it needn't change a whit (quoted in Bailey, 1999, p. 85).

Self-reflexivity, therefore, was an important aspect of my research. I accomplished this using memos, journals, and a critical analysis of my role in the co-construction of the research interviews and findings. Finally, a goal of this research was to explore the suitability of employing narrative methods when working with Deaf participants.

Rationale for This Study

This research was inspired from a desire to learn more about the experiences of individuals who are Deaf. The personal narratives of the participants contribute insights and understandings about the experiences of living with a hearing loss. In addition, drawing on the personal wisdom of the participants, the findings contribute insights into how hearing loss influences the construction of identities. Third, the critical examination of the cultural tales

provides insights into the relations and practices of culture, specifically focusing on how the discourses surrounding normalcy, difference, passing, and Deaf culture are at work in the narratives. These findings may be beneficial to families with deaf and hard of hearing children and the professionals who serve them. The findings also have implications for policies and practices of professionals (e.g., family doctors, educators, counselors, and social workers). In seeking to better understand the experiences of deaf people, policy makers and professionals are in a better position to assess deaf people's needs and develop policies to meet these needs (Lane, 1992). Finally, through the process of conducting this research, new research questions emerged relating to both theoretical and methodological issues. Carrying out this research, therefore, has lead to new thought-provoking research questions for further exploration.

An additional rationale for this study was related to the methodological implications of using narrative methods. Conducting this research with these methods has provided an innovative approach to the study of deafness and identity. It has allowed for an assessment of the benefits and limitations of using a narrative approach with the three Deaf participants in my study.

Writing as Method, Constructing a Dissertation

Because all research – traditional and CAP [creative analytic practice ethnography][9] –
is now produced within the broader postmodernist climate of "doubt," the readers
(and reviewers) want and deserve to know. How does the author position the Self as a
knower and a teller? These questions engage intertwined problems of subjectivity,
authority, authorship, reflexivity, and process on the one hand and representational
form on the other. (Richardson, 2000, p. 930)

Based on this appeal, prior to presenting an overview of the organization of this dissertation by chpaters, I discuss where I situate Self as "knower and teller." My own writing is positioned within a poststructural paradigm that claims that knowing and writing (both process and product) are always "partial, local, and situational, and that our Self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it" (Richardson, 2000, pp. 930-931). This

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[9] In the past, the kind of research Richardson (2000) eluded to has been called non-traditional or alternative research. Richardson, however, argued that this language perpetuates the non-acceptance of these forms of research. Instead, Richardson admonished that we need language that delineates its difference and its legitimacy. Therefore, she developed the language of CAP [creative analytic practice ethnography].

suggests two important points to qualitative writers. First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times. Second, it frees us from trying to write "a single text in which we say everything at once to everyone" (Richardson, p. 929).

In relation to the first point, I committed myself to embrace self-reflexivity as an essential process throughout my research. I believe it is important that readers (and reviewers) of my study are aware of my situatedness as a hearing researcher interviewing and collaborating with Deaf participants. My 'hearingness' is one of the ways my knowing and telling is situated. Some additional ways I am situated that influence my knowing and telling are as a woman, a Ph.D. candidate, a researcher, and a feminist who draws on poststructuralist ideas. All of these positions influenced my decision-making about how to conduct, analyze, position and write up my research.

With respect to writing invoking the words of Richardson (2000), I maintain that "[t]he contemporary postmodernist context in which we work as qualitative researchers is a propitious one. It provides an opportunity for us to review, critique, and re-vision writing" (p. 936). In light of postmodernist critiques of qualitative writing practices, qualitative work now appears in multiple forms and genres. In making decisions about how to write-up the current study, my epistemological view, that writing is a partial, local, situated representation, influenced my decision to incorporate non-traditional social science writing into my dissertation. I wanted to find methods of writing that would represent the multilayered, selective, partial, located texts found in this dissertation. For example, to open, I share a story that narratively introduces the reader to my topic. Rather, than explicitly unpacking the meaning for the reader, I allowed the metaphor to remain whole. My purpose was "to show rather than tell" (Denison, 1996, p. 352). I also employed rhetorical questions in my writing to invite the readers (and reviewers) to enter my own theoretical questioning. Finally, through self-reflections included in the thesis, I have made transparent some of the important struggles that I encountered as I wrestled with issues of representation, voice, authorship, and authority. The final section of chapter one describes how the current thesis is organized.

The Organization of this Dissertation

Chapter One is the introduction. I present the topic of the present study, hearing loss and identity, and position myself and my study in a poststructural narrative paradigm. One of the ways this is accomplished is in the presentation of a story that invites the reader to experience the topic in narrative form. I outline some of the assumptions of a narrative view of identities, including the importance of discourses. This leads to a discussion of the two dominant constructions of deafness: 'deafness as affliction' and 'deafness as difference.' I relate this discussion back to the topic of this research about narrative identities and hearing loss. Finally, I include an overview of the research question, the purposes of my study, the rationale for the current study, a discussion about the writing of my research, and I conclude with this summary of the organization of the dissertation.

Chapter Two familiarizes the reader to some of the key concepts relating to deafness. I present definitions of deafness and how these terms are used in my study. Second, I present an overview of the sociocultural contexts through which deaf individuals live their lives and navigate the ongoing process of identity construction.

Chapter Three provides an exploration of three approaches to the concepts of self and identity. Given the immense theoretical writings and views on the concepts of self and identity, I chose to focus on the three approaches to self and identity which inform my position. The three approaches are symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, and poststructuralism. The three approaches are critically discussed and I offer some of the implications of these theories for the present study.

Chapter Four focuses on narrative inquiry. First, I provide an overview of the main epistemological tenets of narrative inquiry. The implications are then discussed as they relate to an exploration of narrative identities and selves. Next, I offer a rationale for positioning my research in narrative inquiry (Arvay, 1999, 2002, 2003). Lastly, I describe the collaborative narrative methods (Arvay) used in the present study. This includes an examination of how participants were selected and recruited, a delineation of the analytic process (data collection, transcription, analysis, presentation of the findings), and finally, a discussion that examines the issue of legitimation of qualitative research in the wake of the postmodern turn (Denzin, 1997, 2000; Lather, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Chapter Five is divided into two parts. Part one presents the findings of my research. I wanted to represent my findings in a way that was congruent with my narrative positioning. Thus, the findings are represented as narratives summaries of the participants' life stories. It is hoped that narrative and story offer a multilayered, multivoiced representations of Deaf women's narratives of identities. Part two offers some of what traditional social science has viewed as the discussion. I offer my interpretations of the findings. Presented is my reading across the participants' narratives.

Chapter Six presents an overview of the empirical literature that has focused on hearing loss and identity. I review this literature and situate the findings and my interpretations within the social science discourse on hearing loss and identity.

Finally, Chapter Seven offers a conclusion to the dissertation. I discuss implications for deaf individuals and their families and the professionals who work with deaf people and their families. I explore some of the methodological implications of adopting a collaborative narrative method (Arvay, 1999, 2002, 2003) in a study with Deaf participants. And finally, I present some of my thoughts about possible future research ventures.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO DEAFNESS

This chapter is an overview of important key concepts relating to deafness. Because I was interested in the experiences of Deaf women who were born with a hearing loss or lost their hearing before the acquisition of language, the focus of this chapter is narrowed to highlight the experiences of prelingually deaf persons. First, definitions of deafness and the implications of these definitions to this research are discussed. Next, the sociocultural contexts of deaf children's development into adulthood are discussed.

Definitions of Deafness

Defining terms relating to deafness is not a straightforward process. In fact, "there does not appear to be any clear-cut definition of who is deaf and who is hard of hearing throughout the literature" (Carver & Sam, 2000, p. 5). There are audiological, functional and sociological approaches to defining the terms 'deaf' and 'hard of hearing.'

Audiological definitions emphasize the "particular decibel loss across a continuum from mild to profound" (Vernon & Andrews, 1990, p. 3). Typically, those individuals with mild to severe losses are called hard of hearing, while those whose hearing losses range from severe to profound are often called deaf. One of the complications of this approach to defining hearing loss is that a particular decibel loss does not necessarily reflect the quality of sound that the individual can or cannot interpret, with or without hearing aids. An audiological measurement is a tool that measures a degree of loss but not necessarily the functional implications of that loss.

Another approach to defining the terms deaf and hard of hearing emphasizes the functional practices of the individual with a hearing loss. The communication methods used by the deaf individual are stressed. According to this practice, deaf persons who use manual communication[10] are labeled deaf and those who use auditory/oral communication are labeled hard of hearing. Although such labels may show a relationship to an individual's audiological status, this is not necessarily the case. Two people may have identical audiograms indicating a severe to profound hearing loss, but for a complex number of reasons they may use different methods of communication. For example, one of the

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[10] There are numerous forms of manual communication used in North America, such as manually coded English and Pidgin Sign English [PSE]. However, only American Sign Language [ASL] and la Langue des Signes Quebecoise meet the requirements of true languages as defined by linguists.

individuals may receive greater benefit than the other from technical devices such as hearing aids, making speech audible and decipherable. An additional reason for the difference in methods of communication between individuals with similar audiograms may have been their differing upbringings, one of which emphasized an auditory/oral approach to communication, while the other emphasized sign language. The reasons for individuals' choices of preferred communication methods is multifaceted and complex, and relate to both physiological aspects of a person's hearing loss and sociocultural factors.

Sociological definitions are another way of defining deafness. These definitions are less concerned with audiological measures and instead emphasize attitudinal parameters such as an individual's affiliation with Deaf people and her use of American Sign Language. From this perspective, an individual may have a hearing loss that typically leads others to label her hard of hearing by audiological definitions, but she may choose to identify herself as culturally Deaf, that is, as a member of the Deaf linguistic and cultural minority group. Based on these practices, writers frequently use lower case "deaf" to differentiate an audiological hearing loss and uppercase "Deaf" to specify a sociocultural meaning of deafness.

Acquiring an understanding of these approaches to defining deafness is valuable because each definition of Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing represents a possible discourse that deaf individuals may draw on when constructing their identities. In fact, researchers (e.g., Fischer & McWhirter, 2001; Glickman, 1993; Leigh, Marcus, Dobosh, & Allen, 1998) concerned with deafness and identity have emphasized the importance of exploring how participants identify themselves. They have suggested that the terminology individuals use to describe their hearing loss is related to their respective identities (Leigh, 1999). For this reason I was interested in exploring how the participants in this study employed the numerous definitions of deafness and how these definitions operated throughout the participants' narratives. Therefore, I wanted to be careful not to impose specific definitions of deafness onto my participants, but, rather, allow them to draw on the definitions and terminology that they felt best represented their own views and meanings of hearing loss.

For the purposes of this paper I used the following definitions (unless otherwise specified) when writing. Drawing on a sociological approach I used 'Deaf' to refer to individuals with a hearing loss who identify themselves as culturally Deaf – members of the Deaf linguistic and cultural minority group (Sacks, 1989). In addition, I used the term 'deaf'

as an audiological term to denote a hearing loss in which the individual cannot process conversational speech. Lastly, I used the term hard of hearing as an audiological term to refer to a hearing loss where "the condition is not severe enough to impair linguistic processing through hearing, with or without hearing aids or devices" (Carver & Sam, 2000, p. 6).

Sociocultural Contexts of Deafness

In this study I explored how three Deaf women understood the influence of hearing loss on how they constructed their identities. Individuals construct identities as they navigate the contexts in which they live their lives. Living with a hearing loss provides a different situatedness, as people go about this process of identity construction. This section provides an overview of some of the important sociocultural contexts that affects a deaf person's lived experiences and influences how she negotiates her identities.

At the outset it should be acknowledged that complete and accurate descriptions of deafness and deaf people are not possible (Marschark, 1993). Deaf people in North America are a heterogeneous population. In fact, Marschark (1993) maintained that deaf individuals vary even more widely than the majority hearing population. In addition to factors contributing to heterogeneity in the general population, diversity in the deaf population is affected by the type of deafness (e.g., hereditary or adventitious), physiological factors related to hearing loss (e.g., the degree of hearing loss, age of onset of hearing loss, the possible benefit of technological aids), family composition (e.g., did the deaf child grow up with deaf or hearing parents?), and the quality and type of education deaf children receive (Marschark, 1993).

As stated above, one important variable affecting deaf people's experiences is the age at onset of deafness. The focus of this study is individuals who were born deaf or acquired a hearing loss prior to the acquisition of language. The proceeding section, therefore, is limited to the experiences of individuals who are prelingually deaf.

Prelingual deafness is a low-incidence disability[11] with only 1 in 1000 born prelingually deaf (Ries, 1986; Schein, 1989). Hearing loss for prelingual deaf children is not simply the inability to perceive sound; it is the inability to perceive auditory/oral language

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[11] Members of the Deaf community maintain that deafness does not constitute a disability. However, when reporting and counting those individuals with hearing loss, national statistical surveys categorize hearing loss as a disability. For the discussion of incidence, therefore, I, too, will employ the term disability.

and communication which can have psychosocial, cognitive and emotional consequences in development (Schlesinger & Meadow, 1972).

Families and Deafness

The family context, the initial and primary source of nurturance for individuals, plays an important role in individuals' psychosocial development and is an important context where individuals negotiate identity (Leigh & Stinson, 1991; Resnick et al., 1997). When the dimension of deafness is added, additional factors shaping a deaf child's family context need to be considered.

One important variable influencing the deaf child's experiences in the family context is the audiological status of family members. For the small number (approximately 10 percent) of deaf children who have one or two deaf parents, the experience of being deaf is significantly different from that of deaf children born to hearing parents. First, Deaf parents commonly look forward to the birth of a deaf child with whom they can share their language and culture (Johnson, Liddell, & Erting, 1989; Schein, 1989). In fact, it has been theorized that deaf family members and early affiliation with the Deaf community might serve as a shield against the negative attitudes that the hearing majority holds toward deaf persons, thus contributing to the socio-emotional development of deaf children (Bat-Chava, 1994). Of crucial significance to deaf children born to Deaf parents[12], however, is the experience of immediate and ongoing exposure to language from birth. There is "a channel of communication that serves cognitive, linguistic and social functions" (Marschark, 1993, p. 23). The importance of early linguistic exposure cannot be minimized. In fact, research continues to demonstrate that deaf children of Deaf parents develop on par with hearing children who have hearing parents in terms of language and social emotional development, at least during the first few years of life (Meadow, 1980; Schlesinger & Meadow, 1972; Vernon & Andrews, 1990).

The experience for deaf children of hearing parents is quite different. Over 90 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents for whom a diagnosis of deafness is "commonly traumatic and unexpected" (Johnson et al., 1989, p. 1). These parents frequently know very little about hearing loss and deaf people (Johnson et al.). Thus, hearing family members seldom have the communication skills or the knowledge and experience required to provide

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[12] This situation presupposes the use of a sign language or other form of manual/visual communication.

the deaf child with an accessible context for the acquisition of either a natural language[13] or the cultural understandings and experiences available to hearing children (Johnson et al., p. 1). Furthermore, discovering and confirming a diagnosis of hearing loss is not a simple process[14]. Traditionally, the most cited age of diagnosis of congenital hearing loss has been approximately two-and-a-half years of age (Mehl & Thomson, 1998). Furthermore, there exists "a significant lag time between the time parents first become suspicious that there is something wrong and the time deafness is finally diagnosed" (Harvey, 1989, p. 33). A recent survey (Meadow-Orlans, Mertens, Sass-Lehrer, & Scott-Olson, 1997) revealed a five-month delay between time of suspicion and time of diagnosis for the deaf children in the study. Therefore, a substantial amount of time may go by before the family receives support and information to help them meet the unique needs of their deaf child.

Process of Diagnosis

In most circumstances, parents consult their family doctor about concerns they have about their child's hearing. After initial consultation, parents are often referred to an audiologist or an ear, nose, and throat doctor who will assess the child's hearing. These professionals, with whom families have initial and early contact, play a role in the parents' decision-making process. The professionals' views about hearing loss and their knowledge of available resources will influence the kinds of information and advice that hearing parents receive and, to varying degrees, parents' decisions concerning communication practices and educational placements for their deaf child (Lane, 1992).

Because most hearing parents have never thought much about deafness before having a deaf child, their initial views of deafness are likely shaped in large part, by their doctor and other health professionals (Foster, 1989). Many doctors, including the other professionals to whom they might refer the family for help, hold a medical model of deafness, regarding it as a pathology (Lane, 1992). Vernon and Andrews (1990) explained that "these professionals [i.e., doctors and audiologists] have extensive knowledge of the auditory mechanism. Unfortunately, this is all they know about deafness. Parents, not realizing this limitation, expect advice on social, educational and psychological issues related to hearing loss" (p.

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[13] This refers to languages that are naturally acquired by children during human development.
[14] Professionals continue to advocate universal hearing screening tests; however, in Canada this is not standard practice in every municipality.

132). In fact, a recent Canadian survey (Carver & Sam, 2000) showed that the bulk of post-diagnosis information continues to be given from the health sector:

> . . . health authorities such as hospitals and clinics provided the bulk (48%) of [post diagnosis information] and services with schools for the deaf and non-profit agencies providing much of the remainder (38%). Even then, some of the non-profit agencies subscribe to the medical model of deafness . . . it raises questions of the impact of this model on parents' ability to make fully informed choices on behalf of their children (p. 60).

Consequently, many parents initially adopt a medical view of deafness that defines how the deafness should be handled with respect to possible interventions (Foster, 1989).

<center>Early Intervention and Education</center>

In general terms, deafness is a physical condition that in the past has been medically diagnosed but educationally managed. In fact, previous researchers (e.g., Israelite, Ower & Goldstein, 2002; Leigh, 1999; Stinson & Whitmore, 1996; Warick, 1994) have emphasized the importance of early intervention and educational contexts in the lives of deaf and hard of hearing children, influencing psychosocial development, academic achievement, and identity.

Upon diagnosis, parents are encouraged to find and participate in an early intervention program as soon as possible. A premise of early intervention programs for deaf and hard of hearing children and their families is that education begins at birth. The specialized professionals (e.g., teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing, audiologists, speech language pathologists, family support workers, early childhood educators) employed by early intervention programs, therefore, work with the families to facilitate the deaf child's physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social development (Carver & Sam, 2000). Deaf children begin their education early (Vernon & Andrews, 1990).Participation in the educational system, however, is not a straightforward process. Parents of deaf children face a dramatically different scenario, finding themselves in the middle of what has been termed an "ideological mine field" customarily known as the methods of communication debate (Lane, 1992). In fact, tensions and conflicts are concretized for parents as they are forced to choose a program advocating a particular method of communication for their child.

Methods of Communication

Historically, the methods of communication debate has centred on the opposing views of whether deaf children should be taught to speak, lipread and use their residual hearing (e.g., an oral approach) or use a form of manual communication (e.g., sign language). Proponents of the oral approach argue that hearing loss is an impairment that should be minimized, and they emphasize the importance of spoken language in achieving integration in the hearing and speaking world. They caution that the use of sign language is restrictive, limiting the deaf child to a future in an isolated Deaf world.

Advocates of manual communication argue that deaf children should be taught using sign language[15]. They argue that lipreading and speech are difficult tasks and a labour of years. Furthermore, not all deaf children are able to master these difficult skills. Instead, they maintain that deaf children should be taught using their strongest sense, their vision. Manualists are not against the use of speech and auditory training; but, they emphasize the importance of early language acquisition in the overall development of the child, arguing that visual sign language is the most accessible means of achieving this outcome. Additional debate has centred on what form of manual communication to use. There are numerous forms of manual communication, including several versions of manually coded English[16], sign supported speech[17], and American Sign Language[18].

Decisions regarding which methods of communication to use are difficult for parents, and the existing conflicts between programs and professionals do not aid the process. In fact, parents are typically forced to make decisions in the face of conflicting professional opinions.

Despite the ongoing controversy, studies (Desselle, 1994; Moores, 2001; Moschella, 1993) continue to show that accessible communication is important in the social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development of deaf children. Researchers (Brasel & Quigley, 1977; Meadow, 1968; Vernon & Koh, 1970) investigating the development of deaf children of deaf

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[15] Numerous methods of manual communication exist. For example, hearing professionals developed a sign system that mirrored English grammar and syntax called manually coded English. However, only the languages of the Deaf community (e.g., American Sign Language) constitute true natural languages with their own grammars and syntaxes.

[16] These are artificial sign systems which make all (or at least the majority) of spoken English visible on the hands.

[17] Sign supported speech is a method of communication where individuals borrow signs from American Sign Language and use them in English word order while speaking at the same time. Not all aspects of the English language are visible (e.g., prefixes and endings).

[18] American Sign Language is a bona fide language with its own grammatical rules and syntax.

parents have demonstrated the value of early exposure to sign language (Marschark, 1993). Furthermore, some researchers (Bat-Chava, 1994; Foster, 1989) have indicated that the use of sign language may send a signal to the deaf child that the family accepts her deafness. Moores (2001) argued that if parents make every effort to communicate with their child through all available means (e.g., sign language, fingerspelling, gesture, and oral methods), then the child's self-esteem could be positively influenced. Yet, many parents do not sign with their children (Desselle, 1994). This is the case in Canada where a recent survey (Carver & Sam, 2000) showed that 39 percent of parents surveyed initially tried an exclusive oral approach[19]. It should be noted, however, that in many situations families seldom employ just one single communication philosophy. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for parents to change methods of communication as they learn more about deafness and as the child's needs become more evident.

Parents' decisions regarding which methods of communication to employ with a deaf child are made with great difficulty, replete with conflict and controversy. The decision concerning communication, however, is an important one, shaping how the deaf child experiences the world around her. In fact, this decision has implications for how the deaf child experiences her family environment, subsequently influencing personal development and the ongoing negotiations of identity construction within the family context (Leigh & Stinson, 1991; Moschella, 1993). In addition, parents' decisions regarding methods of communication have implications for their choices of educational placement: another critical sociocultural contexts influencing identity construction (Grushkin, 1997; Israelite et al., 2002; Kent, 2003; Leigh, 1999; Stinson & Whitmore, 1996).

Education Options

Similar to the methods of communication debate, conflict permeates the history of the education of deaf children. Much of the controversy has been fueled by the communication debate. However, controversy has also centred on the most appropriate setting for deaf education.

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[19] Interpretation of this statistic should be made with caution because the degree of hearing loss for the child is not known. Children with mild losses may very well benefit from this approach. It is interesting to note, however, that when parents were asked about which method of communication they now use with their children 57% who started with the oral-only approach had eventually changed to the use of signed forms of communication (Carver & Sam, 2000, p. 64).

Parents face a number of options when trying to decide about educational placements for their deaf child. There continue to be segregated programs for deaf and hard of hearing where the students are educated separately from hearing children. One example of a segregated program is the residential school for deaf and hard of hearing children, where the child studies and lives with other deaf children, returning home for weekends and/or holidays. Also, there are day schools for the deaf, where the deaf child studies and associates with deaf children during the day but lives with her family. Historically, deaf children were sent away to residential schools or attended day programs at the residential schools. In the 1970s, however, changes were underway with the passage of PL 94-142 in the United States[20], a federal legislation "which contained a clause requiring education in the 'least restrictive environment' for all handicapped children" (Marschark, 1993, p. 14). This law paved the way for the movement toward integration of deaf and hard of hearing children in public schools. Continued changes in legislative mandates and educational philosophy, along with recent technological advances in amplification (e.g., the cochlear implant), are factors in the ongoing shift away from special schools for the deaf and the corresponding movement towards instruction in the mainstream classroom (Bain, Scott, & Steinberg, 2004).

Despite these trends to mainstreaming, parents choosing this route still face many difficult decisions. Numerous mainstream settings exist. Bain, Scott, & Steinberg (2004) outlined that on one end of the spectrum, deaf and hard of hearing students are fully integrated into hearing classrooms with the use of interpreters and/or assisted devices. On the other end of the spectrum, "are classrooms for deaf and hard-of-hearing students within the mainstream school where deaf students interact with their hearing peers on a more limited basis, primarily in nonacademic subjects" (p. 121). The communication approaches used in these settings may also vary. Some of these educational placements may adopt an oral English approach; others may use fingerspelling, cued speech[21], Pidgin Sign English, or American Sign Language. In addition to variations in communication approaches used in the

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[20] This passing is also significant for the Canadian context as philosophical trends in special education have usually been precipitated and given impetus by trends in the United States (Carver & Sam, 2000)

[21] Cued Speech is a communication system which allows a deaf or hard of hearing person to 'see-hear' every spoken syllable that a hearing person hears. It is a sound-based, visual system. Cued Speech is lipreading supplemented by handshapes at the mouth. With Cued Speech, the lips and the hand are read simultaneously. For English, there are 8 handshapes, each of which represents several consonant sounds, and 4 positions around the mouth, each of which represents several vowel sounds (BC Family Hearing Resource Centre Newsletter, Decemeber, 2003).

classroom, the kind and quality of resources and support available to deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstream settings vary. Available resources in a geographical area can influence what supports are present in the classroom. For example, parents with deaf and hard of hearing children in rural settings who want to have an interpreter in the classroom may face numerous obstacles finding available and qualified educational interpreters. Thus, the diversity of mainstream options and variety or limited available resources compound the complexities of parents' decisions. Regardless of the particular educational experiences the deaf child has, the type of educational setting and its communication practices create a context which have developmental implications affecting socialization and educational development (Johnson, et al., 1989).

As mentioned previously, current enrollment trends following the passing of PL 94-142 in the United States have seen a dramatic increase in mainstream practices deaf and hard of hearing children. This philosophical shift is based on the premise of the "least restrictive environment"; however, controversy exists as to what truly constitutes a "least restrictive environment" for deaf children. Opponents of integration maintain that the least restrictive environment for deaf children is the one where there is full visual access to curriculum both from the instructor and peers. They point out that deaf children in a hearing classroom face communication barriers that they would not face in a program for deaf children (Kent, 2003). Furthermore, they point out that because of funding restraints, deaf children in mainstream settings often do not receive necessary support services (Israelite et al., 2002; Kent, 2003; Leigh, 1999; Stinson et al., 1996; Warick, 1994). For example, Charlson, Strong, & Gold (1992) studied "successful" deaf teenagers' high school experiences. They found that deaf students in the mainstream, particularly during adolescence but also at the college level experience isolation from peers and teachers and frequently lack the support services they need to participate in extracurricular activities (Charlson, Strong, & Gold, p. 261). Proponents of provincial and state programs point to the communicative and social-emotional benefits of having deaf children together in one program. They also highlight the historical value of residential schools as places where deaf children are enculturated into Deaf culture and are exposed to Deaf role models (Grushkin, 1997; Meadow, 1980).

On the other hand, advocates of mainstreaming argue that deaf children in hearing programs learn to function in the hearing world. They also point to the historically poor

educational achievements of deaf children who attended residential programs, and argue that educational standards will be higher in integrated settings. Finally, the trend toward mainstreaming has meant that deaf children who live in places where specialized programs do not exist (e.g., rural settings) are assured the choice of educational services in their local contexts if they choose. This option may be particularly valuable for deaf children and their families who do not want to be separated.

Clearly, educational placement is an important factor in a deaf individual's development, including the construction of identities (Grushkin, 1997; Israelite et al., 2002; Leigh, 1999). School environments are both social and educational contexts where deaf children interact with peers and teachers. Through these relationships they negotiate identities. They express, perform, and make claims for who they are and who they want to be (Mishler, 1999).

Adult Context

Identity construction is an ongoing process and factors related to hearing loss continue to shape a deaf person's lived experience throughout the lifespan. The family continues to be one important sociocultural context within which individuals continue to negotiate identity.

One factor associated with the family that influences an individual's experiences is the hearing status of family members. Although 9 out of 10 deaf people marry other deaf people, 9 out of 10 deaf-deaf marriages result in hearing offspring (Reagan, 1985; Schein, 1989). The subsequent family composition is a deaf-hearing family composition. Communication issues may manifest themselves and issues related to bilingualism/biculturalism may have to be dealt with (Padden & Humphries, 1988).

An additional variable that deaf adults may continue to face are discrimination and negative stereotypes (Bat-Chava, 1994). These negative attitudes and stereotypes held by many hearing people may act as barriers to the success of deaf persons seeking employment, educational opportunity or interpersonal relationships (Bat-Chava, 1994; Blood & Blood, 1982; Lane, 1992; Schein & Delk, 1974). In fact, statistics continue to demonstrate that deaf adults are overrepresented in the lower socioeconomic groups (Marschark, 1993; Schein & Delk, 1974; Vernon & Andrews, 1990). Underemployment and unemployment continue to be chronic problems (Bat-Chava, 1994; Sacks, 1989; Vernon & Andrews, 1990). It seems,

however, that for those deaf adults who choose to identify themselves as culturally Deaf, the Deaf community serves as an important source of social emotional support for Deaf adults (Foster, 1989).

Deaf community

The Deaf community in North America plays a large role in the lives of Deaf people. Schlesinger and Meadow (1972) have suggested three periods when enculturation and identification with the Deaf community might take place: first, at infancy for deaf children of Deaf parents; second, enrollment in a residential school or an early intervention program emphasizing Deaf role models and American Sign Language; and third, in adulthood upon meeting other Deaf adults and learning about the Deaf community. Higgins (1980) has proposed that membership in the Deaf community is based on shared experiences, identification, and involvement. Some have argued for a narrow definition of the Deaf community as including only Deaf people; however, it is more common to embrace an open definition. For example, Padden (1988) promoted the view that the Deaf community is not only made up of Deaf people, but also, of active hearing participants, including hearing relatives, spouses, signing co-workers, and friends of Deaf people. Regardless of the specific definition of Deaf community employed, attitudinal parameters are paramount, most notably a respect for Deaf culture and its most salient feature, American Sign Language.

Throughout Deaf history, there have been individuals who have spoken disparagingly about the Deaf world and the Deaf community, arguing that it is isolating and insular (Lane, 1992). Deaf people, however, do not live in the Deaf community. "There are no towns or even blocks or areas of a city entirely occupied by Deaf residents in North America" (Padden, 1996 p. 82). Deaf people live in a hearing world. In fact, current scholarship today acknowledges the bicultural[22] experiences of Deaf people. Deaf people have always coexisted with hearing people; however, Deaf people are drawn together in community for social and linguistic reasons. In her qualitative study with deaf adults, Foster (1989) found two dominant themes articulated by deaf people that explain an impetus for the Deaf community namely, alienation from hearing persons and identification with Deaf peers. Whatever the specific influences that give rise to it, the Deaf community provides a place of

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[22] The term bicultural refers to the experience of moving between two cultures.

belonging and membership for those deaf individuals who choose to identify and affiliate themselves with it.

Summary

This chapter has clarified important definitions and key concepts related to deafness. In addition, the various developmental contexts in which deaf people live their lives have been described. Positioned within a narrative view of identities, these sociocultural contexts are, I believe, important venues within which prelingually deaf individuals navigate identity construction.

CHAPTER THREE

THREE THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPTS OF

IDENTITY AND SELF

Chapter three presents a discussion of three theoretical approaches to the concepts of self and identity. An examination of the theoretical literature reveals that questions concerning self and identity are complex and multifaceted, gaining prominence across the social science disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, history, philosophy) in the past century. The concepts are not simple. In fact, the terms point to "large, amorphous, and changing phenomena that defy hard and fast definitions" (Ashmore & Jussim, 1997, p. 5). Furthermore, the language used by social scientists concerned with these concepts varies considerably. Pointing to the complexities of the language, Ashmore and Jussim delineated some of the diverse terms theorists have used to refer to these concepts: sometimes theorists employ the term 'identity', sometimes 'subjectivity', sometimes 'self-hood' and sometimes 'the self' (Ashmore & Jussim). Elliot (2001) argued that "these terminological differences are not especially significant, primarily because all these terms can be said to denote a concern with the subjectivity of the individual" - selfhood (p. 9).

In addition to issues of language usage, theoretical tensions and debates resulting from a range of differing traditions intensify existing complexities related to the concepts of identity and self. Ashmore and Jussim (1997) identified two central ways traditions vary in their emphasis. First, debates exist as to the extent that identity formation results in a unified self or multiple selves (or even if a self exists at all). Second, tensions exist as to the extent that the process of identity formation is inherently individual and/or influenced by social, cultural and historical variables. In light of the existing range and quantity of theoretical perspectives that are concerned with self and identity, I have focused this theoretical discussion on three approaches to self and identity, that is, symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, and poststructuralism. I conclude this chapter by discussing the implications of this theoretical review for this present study.

Symbolic Interactionism

Sociological traditions have emphasized "the need to look at the impact of other people, the wider society, as well as cultural forms and moral norms, in the making of self" (Elliot, 2001, p. 24). Symbolic interactionism is often situated within the sociological

tradition. Interestingly, however, one of its founding fathers, George Herbert Mead, did not identify himself as a sociologist. Mead referred to himself most frequently as a social psychologist or philosopher.

Symbolic interactionism, although differing in subtle ways between theorists, is a theory about the development of self in society. The role of the social is highlighted in the process of identity construction. According to symbolic interactionists, identity is a complex social construction evolving out of various interactions with others in multiple social contexts (Baumeister, 1997). As people maneuver through everyday situations (such as those experienced in family, school and work) they are continually interpreting their world and the people around them. It is on the basis of these interpretations that individuals construct identity.

George Herbert Mead (1863 – 1931) is known as a prominent symbolic interactionist. A student of Cooley's work, Mead emphasized how social interaction with others profoundly shapes the development of self (Ashmore & Jussim, 1997). Although Mead retained the view of an inner core self, his conception of the self was preeminently social (Elliot, 2001). Mead wrote

> The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his [or her] relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process (Mead, 1934, p. 135).

For Mead, there was no thinking, or indeed any sense of being a self, that is independent of social process (Gergen, 1999).

A second feature of Mead's (1934) theorizing is the prominence he placed on language. According to Mead, language is at the heart of the constitution of self. Shared symbols allow the natural tendency for role-taking. It is through the experiences of role-taking that a person develops a sense of generalized other, that is, the composite of others' reactions to one's self across situations (Gergen, 1999). "By taking on the role of the other, as he or she responds to my action, I come to understand who and what I am" (Gergen, p. 124). For Mead (1934),

> The self is a social product through and through, an outcome of social symbolic interaction – of emergent, ongoing creation, thinking, feeling, the building of attitude

> structures, the taking on of roles, all in a quest for coherence and orientated to the
> social world. . . . We learn to view ourselves as other people see us, adjusting and
> transforming our self-understanding in the light of ongoing social interaction and
> dialogue (Elliot, 2001, p. 26).

It is out of the sense of the generalized other that an individual develops a coherent sense of self (Gergen, 1999).

Mead's theorizing contributed insights into the importance of context, social interaction, and shared symbolic systems (language). His writings, however, are susceptible to several criticisms. First, some critics (e.g., Elliot, 2001; Gergen, 1999) charge that the model of self proposed by Mead and his followers is too rationalistic, conscious and cognitive (Elliot, 2001, p. 29). As Elliot explained,

> The self is seen as primarily cognitive by symbolic interactionists because the seeds
> of self-consciousness are understood to derive from individuals consciously
> manipulating and constructing identity in accordance with that 'conversation of
> gestures[23]' established through engagement with social process (p. 30).

A second criticism is the perceived disregard for the relations of power in society. Mead's writings tend to overlook the ways in which society is structured, which makes certain ways of being possible and impossible. For example, how does institutionalized racism, heterosexism, sexism, ableism, etc. restrict and/or limit the possible opportunities for constituting self?

If these criticisms, in fact, hold, it remains that Mead's theorizing has contributed important insights into the ways that individuals constitute self. His works introduced a new emphasis on the relationship between the individual and society. Furthermore, Mead introduced the ideas that "symbolic interpretation shapes identities and defines the interaction between self and others in the course of day-to-day social life" (Elliot, 2001, p. 31). In fact, his emphasis on the importance of language and interpretive meaning-making activities laid the groundwork for subsequent theorists advocating a social constructionist approach.

A second theorist often associated with symbolic interactionism, but whose works might be better defined as a dramaturgic perspective, is Erving Goffman (1959, 1963). Like Mead (1934), Goffman (1959) emphasized the importance of context and the role of the

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[23] This refers to Mead's idea of individuals taking on the role and perspective of others.

social in how individuals present their selves. Goffman, however, advanced the idea of a performed self: the self as a consequence of dramatic effect (Elliot, 2001). Goffman (1959) described individuals as performing a multiplicity of roles. The self, then, according to Goffman, is a performed character who undergoes continuous self-monitoring with regard to the responses from others (Lemert & Branaman, 1997). By emphasizing self as a dramatic effect, Goffman highlighted the importance of the surroundings, that is, the audience's responses and interactions affecting the performance. In fact, Goffman argued that all performances of self are situated within interactive frameworks where individuals stylize their presentations of self based on the social conventions and ethical assumptions of the setting (Elliot, 2001).

Elliot (2001) outlined a criticism of Goffman's earlier work by arguing that Goffman's social vision of self-monitored performance presents an inauthentic self – "individuals cynically manipulating appearance and staging inauthentic representations of the self" (p. 34). While some may argue that at the roots of Goffman's theory are moral possibilities where individuals regulate a self based on "the social conventions and ethical assumptions of the setting" (Elliot, p. 34.), a critical analysis of the ways in which society proscribes and limits certain ways of being is lacking. For example, how do constructed ways of being a woman proscribe and limit certain ways of being? How do relations of ruling (Smith, 1987) limit and/or impose the ways an individual may present her self?

Conclusion

In the previous section I have explored the works of two prominent scholars (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959) associated with symbolic interactionism. Both theorists highlighted the importance of social context and symbolic systems (language) in the development of self. Furthermore, both made a substantial contribution to an appreciation of human interdependency (Gergen, 1999). In spite of the strong emphasis on relational and social influences, however, symbolic interaction theorists retain an individual subject. As Gergen explained about symbolic interactionism, "there is a social world and it preexists the psychological; once the social world has made its mark on the psychological, the self exists independently of society" (p. 129). There are other ways of conceiving self and identity. The next section includes a discussion of the approach of social constructionism.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism finds its roots in the tradition of symbolic interactionism. Previous scholars (e.g., Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959) challenged existing notions of an individuated process when constituting self. They emphasized the importance of the social context and the significance of the shared symbolic systems, specifically language. Social constructionism does not oppose symbolic interactionism as much as it expands on these ideas.

Symbolic interactionism has primarily explored the development of self in society. Social constructionists extend the theorizing to include epistemological implications and then relate these back to theorizing about self. For example, a main epistemological tenet of social constructionism is that "human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). Extending this epistemological belief of social constructionism to the 'self', the idea of a core essence, a self, becomes questionable.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) were two of the first scholars to outline the epistemological and ontological assumptions of social constructionism. Knowledge, they reasoned, always comes from a certain position and it is mediated through the linguistic practices available to us in our societies. Subjectivity is always present. This advanced the view that both knowledge and ideas are socially constructed. These constructed ideas become objectified – take on the appearance of 'reality' – through the process of institutionalization. This position about ideas and knowledge have implications for the way Berger and Luckmann understood 'self'.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) argued that the self couldn't be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which it was shaped. They emphasized a dialectic relationship between humanity and the social world: humans construct and are constructed by society. In fact, Berger and Luckmann outlined three dialectical moments in social reality: 1) Society is a human product, 2) Society is an objective reality, and 3) Man [sic] is a social product. Berger and Luckmann reasoned that human beings produce reality and thereby produce self.

Like symbolic interactionists, Berger and Luckmann (1967) embraced the importance of the social context, but they extended these ideas to demonstrate that the self is not fixed or stable. The dialectic relationship between society and humanity means that nothing is static,

including the self. The self is socially constructed through social interaction and language, but this occurs in a social context that is changing, and therefore, the social construction of the self is an ongoing process with no end point.

Since this early work by Berger and Luckmann (1967), a growing number of theorists aligning themselves with social constructionism have come to envision the concept of a relational self (e.g., Gergen, K., 2001; Gergen, M., 1997). Rejecting the idea of an inner, core essence, these theorists are struggling with ways of "understanding ourselves as constituents of a process that eclipses any individual within it, but is simultaneously constituted by its individual elements" (Gergen, 1999, p. 129). The notion of self-as-relational has become Gergen's (1999; 2001) preference. This concept promotes "a vision of human action in which rationality and relationship cannot be disengaged, in which our every action manifests our immersion in past relationships, and simultaneously the stamp of the relationship into which we move" (Gergen, 1999, p. 131).

Central to Gergen's (1999) theorizing are his two assumptions about language and meaning. Drawing on the works of Bakhtin, Gergen argued that meaning is generated in dialogic relationship. "There is no meaning that is not derived from relationship itself" (p. 131). Second, Gergen proposed that "the ability of the individual to mean anything – to be rational or sensible – is owing to relationship... Self and other are locked together in the generation of meaning" (p. 131). In fact, quoting Bakhtin, Gergen wrote, "to be means to communicate" (p. 131).

One criticism of Gergen's recent work (1999) is that it overlooked individual subjectivity. Responding to questions about individual subjectivity, Gergen reframed the concept of individual subjectivity as individual action (including thought). He argued for a theoretical approach which "treats all psychological discourse as performative and embeds performances within relationships" (p. 133). Based on these two theoretical moves, Gergen maintained that we can now see the entire vocabulary of the mind as constituted by and within relationship.

Conclusion

Social constructionism is a tradition which shares some assumptions with symbolic interactionism. Social context, symbolic systems (language) and interaction are all important concepts to both social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. Social constructionism,

however, is informed by a postmodern approach to identity and self, and is based on a dialectic view of self and society, where individuals influence and are influenced by society. Self becomes de-stabilized, and self is no longer fixed and static. It is fluid and "in process". Recently, as exemplified by the work of Gergen (1999), many social constructionist are striving to delineate a new way of envisioning self – relational selves. This may be both a movement from a poststructural position which conceives of the self as mere text, and a rejection of modernist notions of an individual core essence. The next section explores some of the assumptions of poststructuralism as they pertain to the concepts of identity and self.

<p style="text-align:center">Poststructuralism</p>

Poststructuralism as a term designates a broad variety of critical perspectives (Abrams, 1999). It is not a 'theory' but rather, a set of theoretical positions. These theoretical positions are not necessarily shared by all who call themselves poststructuralists; and some of the theoretical stances are shared by those who call themselves social constructionists.

A central assumption of poststructural thought is a rejection of essentialist and foundationalist concepts (Lye, 1997). This rejection is premised on the primacy that language and discourse play in the construction of knowledge and ideas. The poststructural anti-essentialist stance suggests that there is not a 'reality' that exists independent of language and discourse – all we have is 'text' (Lye). A related concept is antifoundationalism that rejects the idea of stable, unproblematic representations of the world. There are no underlying structures or essences to be discovered.

Anti-essentialism and antifoundationalism have significant implications for theorizing about self and identity. Enlightenment views of humans as individuals with an inner core self are rejected. Instead, "persons are culturally and discursively structured, created in interaction as situated, symbolic beings" (Lye, 1997, p. e1). 'Subjects,' therefore, are created through cultural meanings and practices. The human – the embodied being – lives in a material world, but meaning, value and self are the effects of discourse and text. Subjects, then, are the constructions of cultural discourses and "occupy various culturally-based sites of meaning" (e.g., as family members, as gendered, as clients of psychotherapy) (Lye). Each site affects a different configuration of the self.

A major criticism of a poststructural conception of self – 'subject' – is that self is reduced to text. Critics question the status of individual subjectivity. However, theorists

drawing on poststructural ideas reject the criticism on the grounds that such logic replicates foundationalist notions of a core, individual self.

<div align="center">Implications for my Research</div>

In the previous sections I discussed three approaches to the concepts of identity and self. A review of all theoretical approaches to self was not feasible given the immense range of traditions. Therefore, I focused the discussion on three approaches (symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, and poststructuralism) and their theoretical contributions concerning identity and self. My rationale for proceeding this way was that the narrative methodology I use for this study was informed by theoretical assumptions advanced by these traditions. I also wanted to explore the convergences among these approaches and how these related to my research.

I embrace a postmodern, narrative view of 'self'. This view is situated within a social constructionist perspective and borrows from a poststructural view of language and discourse. 'Self', therefore, is not an inner core essence, but rather, is multiple, fluid and in-process with no end point. Selves and identities are socially constructed through the narratives we tell. We are constantly revising and re-storying our selves/identities. Another critical assumption of my views is drawn from poststructural ideas about language and discourse. I believe that in the act of narrating selves/identities, individuals draw on the discourses available to them in their culture. This does not mean that I embrace the view of self as merely a product of text; however, I do consider language and discourses (cultural representations) as tools with which individuals construct meaning. Based on these assumptions, it becomes clear that my own thinking about self and identity has been influenced by positions and assumptions from all three traditions discussed previously.

CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVE INQUIRY AND RESEARCHING IDENTITY

The focus of this chapter is narrative inquiry as an alternative approach for studying human existence, particularly the concept of identity. Part one provides an overview of the main epistemological tenets of narrative inquiry. Next the implications of these epistemological positions are discussed as they relate to identity and self. Part two provides a rationale for a narrative approach when researching how Deaf women perceive the influence of hearing loss on their identity, followed by a description of the narrative methods used in this study.

PART I - Narrative Inquiry and Social Constructionism

Narrative inquiry is rooted in the epistemology of social constructionism (Burr, 1995). Social constructionism presupposes that knowledge does not exist independent of humanity. Rather, humans actively engage in the process of constructing and making meaning (Schwandt, 2000). Such a position invites a critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge and stands in opposition to the dominant positivist and empiricist beliefs in traditional sciences that the world unproblematically reveals itself to us, and, therefore, with proper methods we can discover and know 'Truth' (Burr, 1995). In fact, two fundamental positions of social constructionism are anti-essentialism and anti-realism.

Basic to social constructionism is the anti-essentialist view that there are no underlying essences and structures of the social world to be discovered or objectively known (Gergen, 1999). We are born into a cultural world with existing conceptual frameworks and categories. These "concepts and categories are acquired by all people as they develop the use of language, and are thus reproduced every day by everyone who shares a culture and a language" (Burr, 1995, p. 7). Individuals construct or reproduce knowledge using the linguistic tools available to them in their culture (Burr, 1995). What we know are not products of direct observation of the world, but are products of social linguistic practices. 'Truth' and knowledge of the social world, therefore, is hermeneutic in nature. Multiple 'truths' and interpretations exist which are culturally and historically situated. This view is known as anti-realism (Burr, 1995).

As seen in the discussion above, language plays a central role in social constructionism and likewise, narrative inquiry. Traditionally it was theorized that language

mirrored reality. However, the French linguist de Saussure (1974) introduced the structuralist view that "language does not reflect a pre-existing social reality, but constitutes, brings a framework to that reality for us" (Burr, 1995, p. 37). de Saussure reasoned that the link between the signifier (spoken sound) and the signified (the concept) is an arbitrary one. Arbitrary in this context does not mean random: we operate with concepts that are pre-existing and tied in with the kind of society in which we live (Burr, 1995). Social constructionism embraces a poststructural view of language, building on the structuralist ideas of de Saussure.

A poststructural view of language maintains that the negotiated meanings between signifier and signified are never fixed, are always open to question, always contestable, and always temporary (Burr, 1995). This view of language, as the medium where knowledge is constructed, has major implications for understanding self and identity.

Language, Discourse, and Narrative Identity

Traditionally, modern theorists (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Mead, 1934) have maintained that although there are social and relational influences in our development, each of us has an inner core being, a cohesive underlying essence - a self – which develops through progressive developmental stages throughout the lifespan (Arvay, 1999). A narrative approach to identity, rooted in social constructionism, offers an alternative view: a view of self as narratively constructed.

If what we know is the result of linguistic social practices, knowledge of the self becomes inseparable from the practice of language (Eakin, 1999). "The person you are, your experience, your identity, your 'personality' are all the effects of language" (Burr, 1995, p. 39). Language becomes the prime site of the construction of the person and it is argued that the form of this expressive process is narrative (Arvay, 1999; Bruner, 1990; Josselson, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988; Richardson, 1997; Sarbin, 1986). "We express, display, make claims for who we are – and who we would like to be – in the stories we tell and how we tell them. In sum, we perform our identities" (Mishler, 1999, p. 19). The act of constructing self is a social and linguistic performance, an ongoing creative process accomplished through narrative (Arvay, 1999; Burr, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988; Richardson, 1997).

The centrality of language in a poststructural narrative perspective raises important implications for the possible ways in which individuals constitute self and construct their

identities. We can only "represent our experiences to ourselves and to others by using the concepts embedded in our language, so that our thoughts, our feelings and how we represent our behaviour are all 'prepackaged' by language" (Burr, 1995, p. 39). Our cultural worlds provide us with pre-existing, often conflicting, discourses and cultural tales. As agents of our own construction, then, we choose from among the discourses available to us in our cultures (Burr, 1995; Richardson, 1997). Identity construction, therefore, is a complex negotiated process between the individual and a society (Josselson, 1996).

This narrative view of identity as process, however, differs from the concept of a developmental process. The narrative perspective of process is multidimensional and multifaceted, not linear in nature. As Josselson (1996) wrote, "I don't believe that there are definable stages" (p. 239); rather, "life is lived multidimensionally and involves both continuity and change" (p. 14). Similarly Mishler (1999) affirmed "the critical importance of change and discontinuity in the formation, re-formation," and re-plotting of adult identities (p. 80). Mishler cautioned,

> We can easily extract chronologies from [participants'] accounts, these sequential orderings of events and episodes linked together by the familiar narrative conjunction, "and then." But it would be misleading to read them as progressive, that is, as linear, continuous movement through developmental stages... I am not arguing that our lives are chaotic, nor suggesting we cannot construct meaningful narratives of our experiences – our life stories. However, if our stories represent our lives with any adequacy, then they must leave room for the complex interplay of multiple and sometimes competing plot lines (p. 80).

We need, therefore, as Bateson (1989) argued, research tools that will allow us to explore the creative potential of "improvised," "interrupted," and "conflicted" lives.

Narrative methods are hermeneutic methods which allow for an exploration of the multidimensional, multilayered and textured contours of human experience. The next section of this chapter outlines and explores the narrative method I employed in this study which explored how three Deaf women understand the influence of hearing loss on their identities.

<div align="center">PART II - Narrative Method</div>

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research strategy that uses narrative materials or stories (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993). "The narrative is

present at all times, in all places, in all societies; the history of narrative begins with the history of mankind [sic]. There does not exist, and never has existed a people without narrative" (Barthes, quoted in Sarbin, 1986, p. 14). Stories exist in culture in numerous forms: novels, nursery rhymes, folktales, myths, newspapers, commercials, magazines, texts, cinema, other literature, songs, and art (Arvay, 1999). Of central importance to narrative researchers concerned with identity, however, are the stories people tell about their lives.

It is the view of narrative scholars that through the act of storying, narrating one's experiences, we achieve our identities – constitute self (Arvay, 2002; Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Richardson, 1997; Riessman, 1993; Sarbin, 1986). Humans are constantly engaged in the activity of construing meaning (Bruner, 1990) and narrative is the primary means through which humans organize their experience and ascribe meaning to human existence (Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Richardson, 1997; Sarbin, 1986). Narrative, therefore, is a means of coming to know oneself and one's world. In our storying, we not only create a narrative, we are constructing ourselves, our identities (Arvay, 2002).

A strong argument for using narrative methods, therefore, is that life stories provide access to the way individuals constitute self and construct identity. Exploring the life stories of the Deaf women in my research allowed me to access the personal experiences of the participants and to explore the meanings that they ascribed to 'deafness' as they constructed their identities. The findings contribute to theorizing about identity and offer insights into the experiences of deaf people, specifically the influence of hearing loss in the process of identity construction. Secondly, a narrative methodology allowed me to explore how culture is at work in the stories the women told. When construing identity, we draw on the discourses available to us in our cultures. Using narrative methods I was able to critically examine the cultural tales embedded in the participants' narratives and how they were at work. Thirdly, a narrative approach allowed for de-centering practices. The poststructural view of language as "competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning and organizing the world, makes language a site of exploration and struggle" (Richardson, 2000, p. 929). Analysis of the participants' narratives, both what is said and not said, allowed for a critical examination of relations of power. It allowed for an examination of the way discourses regulate what can and cannot be said, whose social constructions are valid and whose are erroneous and unimportant (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Finally, I chose to use a collaborative narrative

method developed by Arvay (1999, 2002, 2003) because this method is congruent with my personal epistemological positions of self and identity.

Analytic Method

Social science research is a dialogical process where knowledge is co-constructed. Therefore, I wanted to employ a method that acknowledged both my role and the essential role that my participants played in this research. Additionally, I wanted to use a method that encourages collaboration with participants in the process of interpretation and representation. A collaborative narrative method developed by Arvay (1999, 2002, 2003) is a method that allows this.

The following section describes Arvay's collaborative method as it relates to this study. I first discuss my rationale for the selection of participants and how I recruited them for the study. Secondly, I present an overview of the collaborative narrative method (Arvay, 2002) as it was applied in my research. Arvay's collaborative method involves six stages: (a) setting the stage, (b) the performance: co-constructing the research interview, (c) the transcription process, (d) four interpretive readings, (e) the interpretive interview, and (f) sharing the story. Finally, I discuss the issue of legitimation and how I went about engaging this complex matter.

Participants and Recruitment

Participants.

When considering who to include in this research, a number of criteria guided my decision-making process. First, as a feminist I was interested in centring the voices and lives of women. Therefore, being interested in how prelingually Deaf women perceive the influence of hearing loss when constructing their identities, I wanted to ensure that the participants had lived the phenomenon I was studying and that they were able to tell me about these experiences. Using purposive sampling, I recruited three women between the ages of 30 – 45 who were born with a hearing loss or acquired a hearing loss before the acquisition of language. All three women were raised with oral communication and now as adults have learned American Sign Language, developed connections in the Deaf community, and now identify themselves as culturally Deaf. Two of the women explained that they were born with a profound hearing loss and the third woman stated that she was audiologically "hard of hearing" but identified herself as culturally Deaf. I chose to interview

women who were raised orally and now identify as culturally Deaf because women who fit this description have lived in both the hearing-oriented contexts and Deaf-oriented contexts. I believed that their narratives would shed light on the complex process of navigating multiple identities. By critically examining the women's narratives I would be able to explore how hearing loss influenced how they constituted themselves in the stories they told me.

A second criterion that guided the selection of participants was related to issues of representation. I was committed to conducting the interviews in each woman's preferred method of communication (e.g., spoken English, pidgin sign English [PSE], sign supported speech, or American Sign Language [ASL]). I anticipated that the women would use sign. In fact, all three participants did use sign language, moving between PSE and ASL during the initial interview and the subsequent research interviews. Recognizing the difficulty of interpreting the interview into written English, I planned to take the transcripts back to each participant to check the transcript's content. Therefore, in selecting participants, I wanted to ensure that each woman felt comfortable with this aspect of the research process. I explicitly discussed this aspect of the research with each woman at the initial interview in order to ensure that she was comfortable and willing to participate in this important member check of the transcripts.

The decision to allow the participants to communicate in their preferred method of communication was both a limitation and a positive quality of this research. The choice of participants to communicate in sign language added complexities to the transcription process and further intensified issues of representation. However, allowing participants to choose their preferred method of communication was one of the means by which I was able to adopt a position which prioritized a respect for the principles of diversity and inclusion in my research. From an ethical position I believed that participants should have a choice about which method of communication to use.

My decision with respect to the range of ages of participants was guided by the following rationale. Based on my theoretical perspective that identity construction is an ongoing process with no end point - we constantly "revise," "re-story" our self (Josselson, 1996) – there is no epistemological reason for interviewing one age group over another. Therefore, the issue of feasibility became a guide in my rationale to interview Deaf women ages 30 - 45 years. Based on my affiliations with the Deaf community in the Lower

Mainland, I believed I would be able to successfully recruit suitable participants meeting my criteria using purposive sampling.

Having had previous professional and personal associations in the Deaf community provided both advantages and limitations. Familiarity with the landscape of the local Deaf community meant that I was aware of resources (e.g., individuals and agencies) that I could call on to assist me in the process of recruitment. In addition, having had a history within this community may have contributed to establishing rapport with potential participants. For example, potential participants may have been aware of my ability to communicate in American Sign Language and my openness to ongoing learning about Deaf culture. This positioning may have contributed to potential individuals' willingness to participate. One limitation of my previous history within the local Deaf community was ensuring that individuals were able to voluntarily agree to participate and not feel pressured based on a prior connection. In fact, this issue became one of the factors influencing how I went about the process of recruitment. Recruitment is discussed in the next section.

As a final point, when considering the number of participants in this study, the aim of the sampling and the research method employed were essential guides (Sandelowski, 1995). As discussed in Part one of this chapter, research conducted using narrative methods is not aimed at discovering objective, generalizable 'Truth'. Alternatively, maintaining that multiple situated truths exist, an inquiry with even one participant provides insight and critical understanding of the phenomenon being studied (i.e., hearing loss and its influence on how an individual constructs identity/constitutes self) and allows an exploration of how culture is at work in the story, as told. Furthermore, as Norman K. Denzin (1997) maintains,

> any given practice that is studied is significant because it is an instance of a cultural
> practice that happened in a particular time and place. This practice cannot be
> generalized to other practices; its importance lies in the fact that it instantiates a
> cultural practice, a cultural performance, and a set of shifting conflicting meanings.
> (p. 8)

Rather than being guided by traditional positivist assumptions of knowledge and scientific inquiry, the rationale for my decision of number of participants was grounded in the postmodern rejection of these constructs (Denzin, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988; Richardson;

1997)[24]. Finally, this rationale was guided by the practical realities of dealing with the amount of data collected using a life history approach. The next section describes how I contacted and recruited the participants.

Recruitment.

This study necessitated participants who were willing to share their life stories of living with a hearing loss. I wanted to obtain in-depth stories about each woman's experiences. Therefore, it was important that I recruit participants who were comfortable engaging in this kind of conversational process and who were motivated and interested in the project.

A fundamental commitment in the present research was ensuring the voluntary participation of participants and making certain that participants had the information necessary to give informed consent. Because of my professional and personal history in the community I needed to ensure that potential participants did not feel pressured to participate. I identified 6 individuals who are active in the Deaf community who I approached to serve as contact people and assist me with the recruitment process. I met with each potential contact person to explore her willingness to assist me in the recruitment process, to explain the purpose of my research and to describe the profile of the participants I was seeking. I provided each contact person with an initial letter of contact [Appendix A] and asked her to send the letter to individuals she thought met the selection criteria. I did not know to whom the contact people sent the letter. The letter of introduction introduced me, provided a brief description of the purpose of the research, and, finally, invited interested individuals to contact me. My contact information (phone number and email address) was included in the letter.

Through this process of recruitment, 12 potential volunteers contacted me. This number was reduced to 7 because 5 of the 12 volunteers did not meet the selection criteria: either they were not prelingually deaf or they did not have an oral background. An additional selection criterion was established in order to select the final 3 participants. Having worked in numerous capacities with Deaf adults I decided not to select individuals with whom I had a prior professional relationship. This further narrowed the number to 3. I sent a letter to those

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[24] Important to this discussion is the issue of legitimation and authority which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

women who did not meet the selection criteria, [Appendix B] thanking them for their interest in my research and explaining why I was not asking them to participate. I contacted the remaining three potential participants in order to coordinate a meeting time for the initial interview to "set the stage".

participant demographics

All three participants in the present study pursued post-secondary education. One of the women completed a diploma at a local city college, one woman graduated with an undergraduate degree, and the third participant graduated with a graduate degree in education. In addition, all three women were Caucasian. Two of the women were born to parents who immigrated to Canada from Southern European countries and English was their parents' second language. Finally, the participants' ages ranged from 30 – 45. The importance of highlighting the women's ages relates to the historical context within which these women were diagnosed. The particular historical context has implications for the availability and kinds of resources existing for families of deaf and hard of hearing children. All three families experienced the diagnosis of a hearing loss in the participants' lives at a time when very few resources were available for families and their children. This was even more so for families who lived outside of metropolitan areas such as the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. In fact, one of the participants was raised outside of the Lower Mainland affecting the possible options and services available for this participant's family.

A Collaborative Narrative Method

1) Setting the Stage

The purpose of the initial interview was: (a) to develop rapport with the potential participant; (b) to share my history with 'deafness' and explain my interest in the topic; (c) to review the purposes in conducting the research; (d) to provide a context where the individual's questions pertaining to the research could be answered; (e) to describe the roles and responsibilities that both the participant and I would have in the research; (f) to articulate my personal values regarding the research relationship; (g) to review and sign the consent form [Appendix C] if it was mutually decided that the individual would participate; and (h) to introduce the interview guide [Appendix D] and ask that the participant think about the interview guide and do some preparatory work. Laying the groundwork for the research relationship in this manner was invaluable during the research process.

A critical aspect of the initial interview was to address concerns of ethics: making explicit the limits to confidentiality and ensuring informed consent. Reviewing the consent form facilitated a discussion of these ethical issues. I explained the measures I would take to ensure confidentiality and shared the limits to confidentiality that I had identified. Informed consent was achieved by my explaining the purpose of my research, including a discussion of what the participant's involvement would look like, and by answering any of the potential participant's questions regarding the research process. Finally, I made it clear that the participant could withdraw at any time without repercussion whatsoever and that she may contact my supervisor, Dr. Paule McNicoll, or the UBC Ethics Committee if she had any concerns.

Another crucial aspect of this initial meeting related to roles and expectations of the participant and researcher. Involvement in a study, particularly one exploring an individual's life history, can be very personal and time consuming. This was discussed with each woman. I wanted to ensure that she felt comfortable with this aspect of the research by having an open and frank discussion about it. Also, because I was committed to collaborating with the women during the process of interpretation and presentation of the stories, I wanted the women to be aware of this further time commitment and the energy required to accomplish the collaboration. I estimated that the time commitment from each participant would entail a two to three-hour interview to collect the participant's life story, a one-hour interview to review the content of the transcript, and a two-hour interview to review the narrative summary with the participant to obtain her feedback, which would be considered in the final presentation of her stories. All three volunteers agreed to participate and expressed enthusiasm about their participation.

Finally, the initial interview facilitated the beginning of what is traditionally thought of as the research interview (data collection). Wanting to collect life stories, I adapted an interview guide from the narrative work of Lieblich et al. (1998) [see Appendix D]. Each participant was given a sheet of paper with two columns on it. Participants were asked to imagine their life in terms of a book. Participants were prompted to think about the chapters of their book and indicate in the left column what beginning and end points (ages) mark the various chapters, as they perceived them. Next, participants were encouraged to create a title for each chapter. I included an introduction to the interview guide at the initial interview

because I anticipated that preparation time on this aspect of data collection, prior to proceeding with the research interviews, would facilitate the process of collecting the life stories. The next stage – *the performance* - will clearly outline how the interview process proceeded.

2) The Performance: The Co–Constructed Research Interview

In-depth interviews were conducted with participants using an interview guide adapted from Lieblich et al. (1998) [Appendix D]. The research interviews ranged from 2 ½ hours to 6 ½ hours in length. Collection of the life stories was accomplished in one interview with two of the participants; however, the third life story, which took 6 ½ hours to collect, took place over 2 meetings.

All interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred mode of communication. All interviews were videotaped in order to allow for free-flowing dialogue, providing a record of the interview for later consultation. The video-recorded interview was essential throughout the process of analysis. Finally, participants were given an option of location for the interviews. A room was made available at the U.B.C. School of Social Work and Family Studies and the cost of parking was offered. The decision about location was guided by each participant's comfort and issues of accessibility. Two of the participants chose to meet in their home and a third chose to meet at a work location.

With respect to conducting the interview, participants were asked to think about their lives as books and identify what they would perceive to be the various chapters to their book prior to the research interview. Two of the three women completed this preparation, but one of the women forgot. She took about 15 minutes before proceeding with the research interview to identify how she would break her life story into chapters. The interview guide was followed with each participant, inviting stories for each chapter.

The process described above was dialogically co-constructed. As Mishler (1999) explained, interviews are located within an "ongoing stream of social interactions, the 'unfolding scene' of talk: a 'performance'" (Arvay, 2002, p. 16). Both the interviewer and interviewee negotiate mutual understandings of what is being talked about (Mishler, 1999). As Arvay (2002) described, "it is about entering the 'third space'" (p. 16). Drawing on the work of Shotter (1996), Arvay (2002) wrote that

our mental activity is 'out there' in the world between us [interviewer and interviewee], not inside our heads. . . understanding or meaning making takes place in living moments, dialogically, and . . . the 'third space' provides infinite opportunities to create connections and understandings in the 'stream of life.' (p. 13)

Interviewing from this perspective is more than just asking the "good" questions (Arvay, 2002) or merely an information gathering procedure (Mishler, 1999). It entails being aware and conscious of my role in the construction of the narrative. As I probed and explored the stories that my participants shared with me, I aimed to be engaged at "both an experiential and a reflexive level – in other words, holding a dual consciousness" (Arvay, 2002, p. 17).

Self-reflexivity.

My own subjective process played a significant role in how the interviews were co-constructed. Given the importance of this, I kept an ongoing account of my own process throughout the research process (recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and writing the stories) by keeping a journal and writing memos. The journal and memos were not used as data in the process of analysis, however, they were important tools used during the process of data analysis, including the difficult task of transcription. For example, during the process of transcribing I kept a record of the struggles and complexities I faced trying to represent the signed interviews in printed English. I was able to consult this record when I explored the methodological implications of using a collaborative narrative method with Deaf participants. Also, these notes were valuable in the writing of the methods section of this study. The notes outlined the steps I took to transcribe and analyze the interviews, and the notes provided a record of my decision-making process.

3) The Transcription Process

As with conventional research practices involving interviews, a record of each research interview was obtained. Since I decided to interview Deaf women and encouraged them to communicate in their preferred method of communication, I arranged to videotape all research interviews as the means of obtaining a lasting record that could be consulted throughout the process of data analysis. An advantage of videotaping the interviews was that the videotapes provided a visual record of the dynamics between the participant and myself. A visual record was particularly important given that all three women chose to communicate in sign language, moving between PSE and ASL during the interview.

Ultimately these recorded conversations had to be represented in some kind of text: therefore, the need for transcription. Traditionally, transcription has been presented as a straightforward task of the research process. It is as though researchers have assumed unproblematically that transcriptions are transparent, directly reflecting in text the actual interaction as captured on tape (Lapadat, 2000). This view, however, has been severely criticized (Arvay, 2002; Denzin, 1997; Mishler, 1986, 1999; Ochs, 1979; Riessman, 1993;). In fact, Lapadat & Lindsay (1999) argued that "transcription is theory laden; the choices that researchers make about transcription enact the theories they hold and constrain the interpretations they can draw from their data" (p. 64). Transcription, itself, is an interpretive practice (Riessman, 1993) and, therefore, the exact reproduction of the speech act is impossible (Arvay, 2002); instead, it is incomplete, partial and selective (Riessman, 1993). This points to the necessity of clearly outlining the transcription procedures that were used in my research.

Because analysis is an ongoing process of any qualitative process, I transcribed the interviews myself, and through this process I was familiarized with the contents of the transcripts. Furthermore, I was able to recall and add notes pertinent to the exchange in the transcripts based on my recall of the unfolding, "performed" exchange and based on my journal recordings. In order to produce a printed text of the interviews, I followed five important steps. First, I watched the entire interview to familiarize myself with the interview. Second, watching the video, I tape recorded my interpretation of the interview from sign to spoken English. Third, I transcribed the spoken English translation into printed text. Fourth, I re-watched the videotaped interview in order to include and document important aspects of the interview exchange – such as laughter, crying, and emotional tone – that provided an important context aiding the interpretation of the printed text. Visual markers were used in the text to denote aspects of the speech/sign act in the transcript: **bold** font was used to indicate emphasis and UPPERCASE lettering was used if I chose to represent signs in printed form. In addition, I identified emotional expression in the text using a bracket word, such as (excitement), indicating my interpretation of the emotion. Also, during this review of the interview I marked and recorded any questions that I had with respect to the translation. Finally, I watched the videotaped interview a fourth time in order to record the running time display at selected points throughout the interview. This provided a correlation between the

stage of the interview on the video and the printed text. This final step was indispensable to the later stages of analysis. After completing the transcription I carried out a member check with my participants, providing a copy of the transcript to each respective participant. All three participants made minor changes to the transcripts. Some changes involved typographical mistakes. Other changes were made in response to my queries about the translation. For example, repeatedly in the research interview, one woman mouthed the English word stubborn and signed STUBBORN when describing herself. The participant and I agreed that the most appropriate English word to use in the text was "determined". Overall, there were not substantive changes made to the content of the transcripts.

Upon completing the transcription process, it became clear that reproducing the interviews in printed form intensified issues of representation. Having conducted the interviews in Sign, a visual language with no printed form, an additional task of interpreting the interview from Sign to spoken English was added, thus, adding further complexity to issues of representation that occur when trying to represent spoken language in textual form. Interpreting the sign language used by the participants into spoken form inevitably led to some losses with respect to the complexities, emotions, and meanings of the communication (Skelton & Valentine, 2003). Although this complication could not be completely resolved, I conducted member checks with the participants to elicit feedback regarding my interpretation to assist in addressing these concerns. In addition, I made notes of specific concerns that I identified with respect to interpretation from Sign to English and consulted the participants about these questions. Finally, concerns with representation were again addressed following the writing of the narrative summaries. Two members of my doctoral research committee (my advisor and the methodologist) were consulted regarding the verisimilitude of the narrative summaries in relation to the transcripts. Furthermore, member checks were again conducted with all three participants regarding their individual narratives to elicit feedback and establish that each participant agreed with how her life story was represented.

4) Four Interpretive Readings of the Transcript

Arvay (1999) outlined four interpretive readings that she conducted in collaboration with participants in her study. These readings were reading for content, reading for the self of the narrator and the researcher, reading for the research question, and reading for relations of power and culture. In her research, Arvay (1999, 2002, 2003) asked that each participant

participate in the four interpretive readings, incorporating their analysis and feedback in her findings. Collaboration allowed Arvay (2002) to address complexities that feminist (e.g., Hertz, 1997) writers have highlighted with respect to the ethical issues of representation, authority, and voice. Arvay conceived that a researcher could employ these methods without collaborating with participants; however, she cautioned that the interpretive process would be compromised. She explained that the narratives without the collaborative process becomes the researcher's stories and rely solely on the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of the participants' lived experience" (Arvay, p. 23).

In the present study, the analytic method diverged from Arvay's (1999, 2002, 2003) collaborative method in the degree to which participants were involved in the interpretive readings. In my research the participants collaborated by reviewing their respective transcripts and by collaborating in the construction and representation of the respective narrative summaries found in Chapter Five of this dissertation. My decision to adapt the methods as outlined by Arvay was guided by pragmatic reasons, both with respect to feasibility and time. However, as Arvay (2002) cautioned the interpretive process was compromised. Specifically, aspects of the analysis, that is, the readings across the stories, did not include the participants. These interpretations are *my* interpretations, and therefore, complications relating to issues of authority, representation, and voice are intensified. For example, this dissertation does not give voice to the women's views of *my* interpretations. Do they agree, disagree with some, parts, or all of my analysis? This issue is elaborated upon in the final chapter when the methodological implications of using a collaborative narrative method in the present study are discussed, however, I wanted to highlight these complexities here as they are consequence of my adaptation of Arvay's collaborative method.

As mentioned previously, I did conduct the four separate interpretive readings as outlined by Arvay (1999, 2002, 2003): reading for content; reading for the self of the narrator and the researcher; reading for the research question; and reading for relations of power and culture. Again at this stage, issues with respect to representation became central. Recognizing limitations of the printed transcripts as representative of the performed interview in Sign language, I conducted the interpretive readings by working with both the videotapes and the transcripts. The marked running time of the videotape, which provided a correlation between the transcript and videotape, was an invaluable tool facilitating the interpretive readings.

Watching the videotapes I conducted the interpretive readings, and using a different coloured pen for each reading, I recorded my analysis in the margins of the corresponding section in the transcripts. In addition, I highlighted any newly identified concerns with translation. Going back to the videotapes I was able to conduct the analysis in Sign and recorded my findings in English on the corresponding sections of the transcript.

The following section further details the process of conducting the four interpretive readings.

a) Reading for content – At this level the transcript was reviewed specifically with respect to its content. Were there any typographical errors? Did the text need clarification or further explanation? Were there questions about translation and the English representation? Participants were consulted with respect to the content of their respective transcript. In addition to the explicit commitment to reading through the transcripts once for issues relating to content, I also kept the issue of translation an ongoing focus throughout the process of analysis, documenting any concerns needing to be addressed.

b) Reading for self - This second reading entailed locating the "self" of the narrator. Returning to the videotaped interviews, I watched the co-constructed performance and analyzed how the participant constructed herself in the text. The following probes helped me explore this: "Who is telling this story? How is she situated in this story? What is she feeling? What are her struggles? How does she present herself? What meaning is she trying to convey? What parts of self does she share? As the protagonist of her own tale, what does she want to convey to the reader?" (Arvay, 2002, pp. 25-26). Using a pink-coloured pen I recorded notes and comments in the margin of the corresponding section in the transcript. I also included a reflexive reading of myself in the co-constructed interview. At the end of this reading I summarized my interpretation as it related to these questions.

c) Reading for the research question – The third reading focused specifically on the research question. Watching each video, I considered the following questions: How did the participant represent the influence of hearing loss on her sense of self/identity? What meaning did she make out of her experiences of living with hearing loss? What metaphors did she use and how did they help in making meaning? What is 'not-said,' or implied? Comments and notes concerning the research question were recorded at the

corresponding section of the transcript using a green-coloured pen. At the end of this reading I summarized my thoughts and findings as they related to the research question.

d) Reading for relations of power and culture – The final reading was a critical reading focusing on themes of power and culture as they manifested themselves in the performed interviews. Numerous variables of diversity are possible in an analysis of power and culture. For example, a critical analysis may focus on inequities and experiences of oppression and privilege as they relate to gender, race, sexual orientation, class, geopolitical location,[25] and/or the intersection of these positionalities. In this study, I chose to interview Deaf women because I wanted to centre the voices and experiences of women, however, my critical analysis for this dissertation does not include an analysis of gender. Rather, guided by the research question, I specifically focused on relations of power and culture as they related to hearing loss and difference. Some probes were: "In what ways did the narrator struggle with issues regarding inequities? Where is she silenced? When does she lose her voice? Is the narrator conscious of the power or political influences in her life or of the influences of culture? How do I understand her history/context/social world as described in the text?" (Arvay, 2002, pp. 20–21). And what cultural stories, discourses, are invoked in the text? Finally, I also included a reading both of how my "hearingness" and how my role as researcher influenced the interview and the process of analysis. The thoughts and comments relating to this fourth reading were again recorded in the margin at the corresponding sections in the transcribed text using a purple-coloured pen.

5) The Interpretive Interview: Collaborative Interpretation of the Text

The next phase, the interpretive interview, involved collaboration with the participants in this study. This interview was designed to elicit feedback from each participant about my initial findings and the narrative summary of her life story. All three participants enthusiastically engaged me in a discussion about the initial findings and the narrative summaries. They offered me feedback about content (e.g., clarifying ages and specifics of particular events). They also assisted me in finding appropriate English words to communicate an aspect of their story that they shared with me during the research interview. Finally, all three participants affirmed that my initial theoretical interpretations resonated

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[25] The list of variables of diversity is not exhaustive; rather, it is intended to illustrate some examples of the numerous variables that may be considered in a critical analysis of power and culture.

with their lived experience. The input from participants at this stage of the research was invaluable.

As a feminist researcher wanting to engage in research practices committed to respecting diversity and implementing principles of inclusion, this stage of a collaborative narrative method (Arvay 1999, 2002, 2003) was indispensable. Recognizing my position as a hearing researcher, honouring and including the participants' wisdom and expertise were important ethical commitments. I accomplished this by engaging each participant in a discussion about my initial interpretations and this enabled me to include their insights and wisdom in the final presentation of their story in narrative form.

Other ethical commitments were addressed at this stage of the research process. First, I was able to work with each participant around issues of confidentiality. Each participant gave me feedback regarding potential limits to confidentiality in the narrative summary. These comments and suggestions were taken seriously and together we strategized ways to address these issues. Second, participants were asked for input with respect to their comfort with what was included in the narrative summary. I wanted to ensure that participants consented and felt comfortable with the final presentation of their narrative summary. As a result, some events initially included in the narrative summaries were removed.

6) Writing the Story

With increasing frequency, researchers espousing the situated and socially constructed nature of knowledge are forced to struggle with the problematic issue of representation (Bruner, 1986; Denzin, 1997; Richardson, 1997; Riessman, 1993). In a postpositive climate, "an antifoundational era characterized by the loss of certainties and absolute frames of reference" (Lather, 1993, p. 673), there are "inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and [the] expressions [of that experience]" (Bruner, 1986, quoted in Denzin, 1997, p. 5). All we have are representations which are partial, selective and imperfect (Riessman, 1993).

> We are interpreting and creating texts at every juncture, letting symbols stand for or take the place of the primary experience, to which we have no direct access. Meaning is ambiguous because it arises out of a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst, and reader... Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal (Riessman, 1997, p. 15.)

"There can never be a final, accurate representation of what was meant or said – only different textual representation of different experiences" (Denzin, 1997, p. 5).

What then, do we do with representation? Lather (1993) argued that "the 'crisis of representation' is not the end of representation, but the end of pure presence." (p. 3) Looking harder or more closely will not reveal the truth; rather, social scientists need to explore "what frames our seeing" (Lather, 1993, p. 3). Given the crisis of representation, therefore, reflexivity and transparency about the decision-making process in the scientific inquiry is essential. Awareness of the complexities of representation "press us to be more conscious, reflective, and cautious about the claims we make" (Riessman, 1993, p. 16) and how we represent those claims.

Richardson (1997; 2000) is one narrative scholar who has written extensively on the issue of representation and the magnitude of the writing phase of research. As Richardson (2000) explained,

> I consider writing as a *method of inquiry*, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of 'telling' about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of 'knowing' – method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable. (p. 923)

Richardson (1997; 2000) and others, such as Denzin (1997), challenged conventional social science writing practices, and argued the need for alternative "creative" and "evocative" ways of representing our research: writing methods which invite people in and open spaces for thinking about the social that elude us now (Richardson, 2000, p. 930).

With my research findings I endeavoured to find a means of representing my findings congruent with my narrative positioning. Thus, I chose to represent my findings as narrative summaries of the research interviews. It is my hope that in using a narrative form of representation I have, as Lincoln and Guba (2000) said, "expand[ed] the range of understanding, voice, and the storied variations in human experience" (p. 184), particularly the experience of living as a Deaf woman.

The process of developing the narrative summaries involved four steps. First, building on my prior familiarity of the research interviews, I revisited both the videotaped

interviews and the transcribed textual representation of the interviews in order to create draft versions of the participants' narrative summaries. Initially, decisions of what to include in the narrative summaries were guided by this study's research question: how did Kailyn, Maria and Deborah perceive the influence of hearing loss on identity construction? Second, I consulted each participant regarding her own narrative summary in order to elicit feedback and ensure the summary's verisimilitude. Participants gave feedback with respect to the English translations of some expressions; they offered input regarding issues of confidentiality; and they provided input about events that they did not want to be included in the final narratives. Third, the participants' feedback was incorporated in the final presentation of the narrative summaries. In addition, the names of people, cities and schools were changed in order to address issues of confidentiality. Finally, each participant was consulted again to ensure that she felt comfortable with the final presentation of her life story represented as a narrative summary.

In addition to presenting the narrative summaries, the findings chapter includes a section that presents my interpretation of what was happening in the stories. This is a reading across the stories looking at the common threads in the three narrative summaries. This is my story.

Finally, this study concludes with a discussion chapter that explores the implications of this research for professionals working within the medical systems, the education systems, social workers, and families of deaf and hard of hearing children. Second, I discuss the implications of using a collaborative narrative method with Deaf participants. Finally, I suggest possible future research avenues that have been inspired by conducting this present study.

Addressing Legitimation

What do we do with validity and the legitimation question once we've met critical, poststructuralism? (Lather, 1993, p. 674)

The final section of this chapter focuses on the crisis of legitimation. This crisis specifically confronts the problem of validity. Even in this postpositivist era, validity as a construct is not easily dismissed (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). It is a concept that has to be struggled with (Lather, 1993). In fact, Lather (1993) wrote of her "obsession" with the topic of validity. What makes it an awkward construct is its positivist heritage: where validity has

been understood as correspondence to "Truth" and a faith in the methodological rules and procedures that guide the discovery of this "Truth" (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). Some postmodern scholars have argued for a rejection of the concept of validity (Denzin, 1997). Lather (1993), however, asserted that a postmodern, poststructural consciousness does not release social scientists from confronting validity; but, rather, it "underscores that to not revert to the dominant foundational, formulaic and readily available codes of validity requires the invention of counter discourse/practices of legitimation" (p. 675). Lather (1993), and others (i.e., Denzin, 1997; Richardson, 1997), asked "What are the antifoundational possibilities outside the limits of the normative framings of validity in the human sciences?" (p. 674)

My research deals with the issue of legitimacy by drawing on a poststructural and postmodern view of validity. Numerous concepts have been developed to address the postmodern perspective of legitimacy and validity: i.e., rhizomatic validity (Lather, 1993), catalytic validity (Denzin, 1997), crystallization (Richardson, 1997), and voluptuous validity (Lather, 1993). Four concepts guiding how I struggled with issues of legitimacy were verisimilitude, coherence, aesthetic value, and pragmatic value.

First is the concept of verisimilitude (Denzin, 1997). A poststructural, social constructionist view of research declares the partial and situatedness of the knowledge produced through the research act. This, however, does not mean that researchers are not concerned with trying to produce a likeness or similitude to the truth, as close as possible. Denzin (1997) presented three meanings to the concept of verisimilitude. First, in a more traditional vein, it refers to the degree that the text has captured the "real". In a postmodern sense, the question becomes, does the text "feel" truthful and real for the reader? A second meaning "refers to the relationship of a particular text to some agreed-on opinion – for example, epistemological validity, or what Mishler (1990, p. 417) called valid exemplars accepted by a relevant community of scientists" (Denzin, 1997, p. 10). Finally, a third level, or meaning, refers "to a text's ability to permit naturalistic generalization" (p. 10). Does the text allow for the reader to experience vicarious experience? Or as Stake (quoted in Denzin, 1997, p. 10) asked, "[Does the reader] come to know some things told, as if he or she had experienced them?" These three meanings point to the concept of resonance. Does the text resonate as 'real', 'true'? The second quality, which I invoke with respect to the legitimacy

of my findings, is the concept of coherence. This refers to the degree to which the findings fit together in such a way as to make sense. Is there an order or an integration of the components in the narrative? The third concept, aesthetics, refers to the degree that the findings invite or provoke an embodied, empathetic response from the readers.

In order, to check the verisimilitude, coherence and aesthetic value of my findings I carried out both member checks and peer reviews. First, the narrative story that I wrote was taken back to each participant to check that, in fact, it resonated with her experience. When consulted, all three participants communicated that their respective stories reflected their lived experiences. Second, two members of my research committee (my advisor and research methodologist) read the transcripts and narrative summaries providing their insight and feedback with respect to the verisimilitude, coherence and aesthetic value of the narratives. And third, I asked a Deaf person not involved in the study to read the narratives and check if the stories in fact seem 'real' based on their personal experience. These three avenues allowed me to answer affirmatively to the question Richardson (2000) asked, "Does [the text] seem 'true' – a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the 'real'?" (p. 937).

Finally, pragmatic value is the fourth concept guiding my exploration of the validity of my findings. Pragmatic value refers to usefulness of the findings. This can be both at the individual and societal level. Narratives can be viewed as 'teaching tales'. At an individual level, if as my theoretical positioning maintains, narratives are the means through which we constitute ourselves, there may have been a pragmatic value to engaging the research process for the individual participants. It may have provided an opportunity to see the ways they have constituted themselves and catapult a process of discovery. In fact, all three participants shared that participation in this study fostered an exploration of self, and that they felt they had gained insights about their own lives.

Personally, from a social constructivist position, I also believe that this research is about myself. Therefore, I anticipated personal pragmatic value for my own self as a participant in the research process. One example of a personal value that I uncovered through my exploration of self in the research process was a personal and political commitment to the examination of unnamed and unexamined privilege. I found and developed ideas and language with which to name, counter and challenge marginalizing effects of "othering"

(Wendell, 1996). Finally, at a societal level, I believe that the participants' narratives provide wisdom and insights about the experience of living with a hearing loss. Also, I believe that the narratives offer us access into the ways society's values and culture were at work in each woman's life story. I believe these insights will be useful to deaf individuals and their families in understanding the intersection between an individual's lived experience of hearing loss and the ways culture and society shape those experiences and the meanings we make of them. Finally, I will address the issue of pragmatic value by sharing this story (the research) through presentations at academic conferences, offering to present at local organizations serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families, and, finally, in writing and submitting at least one paper for publication.

CHAPTER FIVE

THREE DEAF WOMEN'S NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY

Chapter Five opens by presenting a narrative summary of each participant's life story. Guided by the research question, I created the three narrative summaries by drawing on the content of the participants' research interviews. After developing an initial narrative, the narratives were taken back to each participant. All three women reviewed their own narrative summary and offered feedback that was incorporated in the presentation of the narratives. Participants provided input regarding the content of the stories. For example, participants offered suggestions about English words and expressions to be used in the stories. Also, participants were consulted to ensure that they gave consent and felt comfortable with the stories that were included in their narratives. Finally, all three women reviewed the narratives in order to assist in addressing issues of confidentiality.

Part two of Chapter Five presents my interpretations of the stories. This is an analytic reading across the three stories. Applying a narrative lens to the life stories, I discuss how four cultural discourses were at work in the narratives the participants shared with me. The discourses that are discussed are: discourses of normalcy, discourses of difference, discourses of passing and Deaf cultural discourses. This section concludes with a re-examination of a narrative perspective of identity.

PART I – Three Narrative Summaries

The following section presents the narrative summaries of the three participants involved in my study: Kailyn, Maria and Deborah. In all three stories, the names of people, cities, and schools have been changed in an effort to address issues of confidentiality. All three women chose the pseudonyms used for their own names. I arbitrarily chose names of the people in the participants' stories. Names of schools were selected based on my familiarity with names of real schools from my personal history. Thus, the names of schools do not reflect any connection to the participants' narratives. Finally, I chose the names of cities used in the narratives as well. The choice of cities was guided by a commitment to issues of confidentiality while still maintaining the integrity of the story. I chose names of cities for each participant's narrative guided by a commitment to reflect similar demographic characteristics of the cities while ensuring that the names of the cities were changed. These are the stories of Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah.

"Kailyn"

Chapter One → "The Diagnosis" (Birth to the end of preschool)

My name is Kailyn. I was born and raised in Prince George, British Columbia with my family – my parents and younger sister. I was born deaf and I'm the only member of my family who is. The others are all hearing. This is my life story.

My parents found out that I was deaf shortly after my birth. My mom, who was substitute teaching at a junior high school, was exposed to German measles when she was pregnant with me. She went to the doctor and they told her, "Oh you'll be fine." The doctor didn't realize that German measles could affect the baby in utero. So I developed rubella and that's how I became deaf.

Rubella affects people differently. The extent to which the fetus is affected depends on what stage the baby is exposed to the virus. For me it was my ears and my heart. My sight wasn't affected because my eyes had already developed.

My mom has shared with me that the period of time following my birth was very difficult for her, not knowing if I was going to live or die. I had to have an operation for a heart condition, and then soon after, she was shocked to find out that I was deaf.

One irony is that my mom actually did a research paper on education and deaf children when she was at university. She didn't realize that six years later she would find out that her own daughter was deaf. Once she found out, my parents got me hearing aids, and my mom began investigating which would be the best way for me to communicate and learn: cued speech, oralism, sign language, total communication, ASL... the whole spectrum.

My mom chose cued speech. A teacher had just moved to Prince George from Australia – cued speech was very popular in Australia at the time. That teacher provided a class on cued speech for a few parents in the city. So that's how my mom learned.

My mom used cued speech with me. She gave me a lot of attention. She wanted to make sure I turned out okay so she dedicated a lot of time and energy towards my development. Frequently, deaf children's language suffers and then their development because the hearing loss is diagnosed so late and they miss out on those crucial early years. But I was fortunate that my mom really worked with me, and it paid off. In fact, my language

was advanced from the beginning. For example, my mom told me the story that my first word was not something simple like flower. My first word was daffodil.

So after investigating various options for me, my parents found a preschool program for children with disabilities. The children at the preschool had many different disabilities, but there were other deaf children as well. A couple of the deaf children used some sign but most of the deaf children were oral, and my mom insisted, "Don't let my daughter sign."

I don't have many memories from the preschool years because I was so young, but I know I didn't identify myself with the children with disabilities. I remember thinking, "No, I'm not like them. I can talk. I can socialize with people fine. I can lipread." But then I went to elementary school. I entered the hearing world and I began to realize that I was different – that in fact there was something different about me.

Chapter Two – "The Elementary School Years"

Once I reached school age, my parents enrolled me in a hearing school where a few other oral deaf children attended. Now I was in a hearing school with all these hearing children and adults and I began to realize that I was different – I wasn't the same as hearing people.

I was mainstreamed with a teacher's aide for English, math, reading, writing – the academic stuff – and I joined the deaf class for speech and auditory training, things like that. So I was with the hearing students much of the time but during social times, like recess and lunchtime, I was always with the other deaf students. When I tried to fit in with the hearing kids some of them would tease me. They would call me "deaf and dumb," "handicapped," "deaf-mute." So instead of playing with the hearing students, I was drawn to the deaf kids. We were different from the hearing kids but we were the same as each other. Those hearing kids who teased us would make fun of how we talked, our gesturing and how we tried to communicate with each other. I think that's why the deaf kids really stuck together. We didn't socialize much with the hearing kids because it was safer to be together.

It was hard being teased for being different. I didn't want to be seen as disabled. I remember viewing the kids from our preschool as handicapped. I didn't view myself like them and I didn't want the hearing kids to identify me as disabled by association. So now that we were at elementary school, I kept the other disabled kids away from me. I didn't want to play with them because I didn't want to be seen as the same as them - handicapped.

For the first years of elementary school I rode the school bus because I lived a ways away from the school. Each morning a bus would come to pick me up and take me to school. We'd go along the bus route picking up other deaf children and then we would be dropped off at one of two programs: a total communication program that used sign and an oral program. Although this led to a division between the deaf children based on communication methods, those of us who were oral still began picking up sign and gesture because we were exposed to sign on the bus. This became our secret code.

We weren't allowed to sign or gesture at my school. In order to sign and gesture we had to hide from the teachers, making sure not to get caught. Sign was something you had to hide. It was a secret. You couldn't tell the teachers. You couldn't tell your parents.

At breaks we would play a game in a dark area of the schoolyard. We would flick hockey cards against the wall. And I remember that we'd sign and gesture back and forth, but we always were looking over our shoulders to make sure that no one would catch us signing.

When I look back I realize that I had a tough time in school, especially as the elementary school years went on. I was doing well academically and mainstreamed for most of my education, but I was doubly isolated. The deaf kids looked at me as being in the hearing world. They were jealous and they'd make fun of me and reject me because I was in the hearing class. Then in the hearing class I was the only deaf kid, and the hearing kids would tease me and reject me because I was deaf. So I didn't have close friends. I didn't fit in either world. I was somewhere between.

Chapter Three → *"The Transition Year"*

One memory that really stands out in mind as significant took place at the beginning of grade seven. All through the earlier years we were not allowed to use sign language or gesture. It was forbidden and that was the rule. In fact, the teachers would monitor us making sure that we didn't use sign language but rather used oral communication. Then when we arrived at school in the fall for grade 7 the teacher said, "I have good N-E-W-S. This year, you know the deaf children from the school bus? They attend Chartwell Elementary School. You know they sign. They use Total Communication."

"Yeah."

"Well, this year you're going to be learning sign language because you are going to be with them more often. You're going to be with them at Ridgemont High School starting in Grade 8."

So we started having field trips together and spending more time socializing with the deaf students from the other school. It was strange because prior to this we weren't allowed to sign, and then suddenly, that changed. Now, we were allowed to use sign language. I think it was important because when we arrived for Grade 8, we already had communication established for our high school years together.

Now I could sign with the deaf children at school, but let me tell you, signing at home? No way! Never. My mom did learn some basic sign when I was about 16, 17 years old like, "How are you?" "Happy Birthday." "How's work?" Basic sayings like that. And my dad? I don't blame him for not learning sign. He couldn't learn sign because of his hands. At home, oral communication has been the expected way to communicate.

Chapter Four → High School Years (Grades 8 to 11)

High school was so different. What a change! Suddenly I had a schedule with breaks. There was homeroom. I was fully integrated so I didn't go to homeroom with the other deaf children. It was a real challenge for me. Once again I didn't feel like I fit in with either the other deaf students or the hearing students. The high school was full of rich snobby kids, and there were many cliques and divisions. Like elementary school, some of the hearing kids teased me.

Again, I didn't really fit in with the deaf group either. In addition to them not including me, I began to realize that I didn't have much in common with them because I was intellectually advanced. This affected my relationship with the other deaf kids. They perceived me as a 'goodie-two-shoes' and they were into the party scene. They didn't include me because they saw me as belonging with the hearing kids. I was never invited to the deaf social times. Basically, I think it was jealousy, but it was hard at the time because I wanted to be included. It's tough when you're young because you feel like you're all alone.

In grade 8 it wasn't so severe, but by grade 9, the deaf kids were in one tight group, and all the hearing kids were split into different cliques. I felt like a loser because I didn't belong in any group.

I tried to fit in. When I was 16, a deaf youth club was started in the city and I became one of the leaders. So, I would see the other deaf teenagers at functions like the Deaf Youth Club, but they still didn't include me in their social times.

One issue that came up again and again for me, was my struggles against the deaf program – the teachers. For example, one of the first struggles arose from my decision not to wear hearing aids any longer. When I stopped wearing my hearing aids and using the FM system the teacher of the deaf in that program told me, "You have to wear it in order to hear."

I explained, "This FM system doesn't help me at all!! I am deaf! I can't hear a bloody thing. Completely deaf! It doesn't help me."

The FM System was this big ugly thing that you had to wear on your side. It had a belt thing that you would attach and then wires that would go up to your hearing aids. It was completely ugly.

They continued pressuring me to wear it. They told me that my speech was better when I used the FM system.

I would say, "NO, it can't be. How can it be? I can't hear myself."

And my mom would tell me, "You do speak better with your hearing aids."

They kept insisting that I use the FM system but they eventually let me make the decision after a struggle.

Another early example of battles that occurred with the teachers of the deaf was when they wouldn't let me take French in grade 8. The teachers of the deaf had the attitude that "deaf can't." But I was really motivated and I wanted to take a second language. So my mom and I set out to get me registered in French. We met with the principal and he responded, "Of course Kailyn can take French. There's absolutely no problem with that. If she wants to take it she can. If you want to, you have the right. That's fine. I don't have a problem with that."

So then we went to speak with the teacher of the deaf and the principal stated, "Yes, Kailyn can take French if she wants."

So I took French and I got an A. The teacher was so great and easy to lipread. So I took French with that teacher for grades 8, 9, and 10. But then in grade 11, I decided not to take it because I couldn't figure out how to do the audio labs. That was a good fight. I proved, "Yeah I can do it!" I really enjoyed it. I also took a dance class even though some

thought it wasn't possible. I learned a variety of dance styles. It was great! You can imagine a chorus line with one person out of step. Guess who it was? Me. I would be there in the line and trying to keep up, visually following the rest of the group because I couldn't hear the music. That was a blast!

Looking back one thing I've realized about school was that I had to work twice as hard as the hearing students. I was constantly studying because I couldn't get all the information in the classroom. So, it was double the work having to read things all over again, and having to make sure that I understood. I had to do double the work.

During high school I recognized that I wasn't happy at Ridgemont High School. I had tons of homework. I felt like I didn't have any friends. I wasn't involved in student life. I did try to get involved in track and field and field hockey, but I gave up on sports because the kids were mean. I felt that there was something missing in my life. I wasn't happy. Furthermore, I began to realize the extent to which the teachers of the deaf controlled the deaf kids.

In about grade 10, the teachers in the deaf program announced a special exchange program to Quebec City. At the time, I shared with one of the teachers that I wasn't happy at Ridgemont and I told her that I wanted to go to a different high school. Well, she kind of pressured me. She told me that if I left Ridgemont, I wouldn't be allowed to participate in the exchange program. She told me that it was a policy. I had to be a student of Ridgemont. So, I stayed for grade 11 because I wanted to be a part of the exchange; only to discover later that kids who had already graduated were participating in the exchange program. I could have transferred to another school. In hindsight, I feel as though the teachers had their own agenda. They wanted to keep all the deaf students at one school so that they could keep their jobs. If the numbers went down in the program at Ridgemont, then they might lose their jobs or get transferred somewhere they didn't want. Because of that teacher's pressure, I stayed for grade 11 in order to participate in the exchange trip.

The week after I returned from Quebec City, my parents took me to an information night at my neighbourhood secondary school. We met with the school counsellor and she confirmed that it wouldn't be a problem for me to transfer to Hillside Secondary School. So we quietly made the arrangements and registered for the fall. "Yeah!"

My parents said, "Promise. Don't say anything to anyone at Ridgemont until the last day of school."

I waited until about June. I was working with my teacher's aide to prepare for grade 12 and I realized, as we were planning my courses for grade 12, that the teachers of the deaf had already planned out my schedule.

I couldn't resist, "I've got to let you know that I'm not going to be here next year." They were so mad. I said, "Sorry, but I'm not happy here. I'm not enjoying myself."

Chapter Five → Grade 12 "A new school"

Then Grade 12 . . . Grade 12 was the best year of my high school because they didn't look at me like I was deaf. I had many connections at this school. My dad coached in the community. I grew up in the community with these kids. Everyone knew each other somehow from growing up in the same area.

When I started at that school, many of the students said, "Oh I remember you." They invited me to hang out with them. They included me. I felt as though I had finally arrived "home" even though there were some frustrations – like communication of course. But it was almost the opposite of Ridgemont. Now I was part of the popular group. So I got to experience both: I got to feel the pain of being an outsider, and I saw the hurt that you could experience by being part of the popular group too. So it was a good social experience for me. I learned a lot.

Grade 12 at Hillside was also the first time I had an ASL/English interpreter. Before I had had teacher's aides who basically had three roles: writing notes, they would communicate what was happening in class, and they would be like a 1:1 tutor if I didn't understand something. Now, having a professional interpreter was different. Having an ASL interpreter really influenced me. I had been basically oral from preschool into my teenage years. I was not a fluent signer. That didn't happen until I was in Grade 12.

What really stands out about Grade 12 though is feeling included and accepted. I had many hearing friends. In fact some of my friends from high school went on to pursue a career in deafness. One went into a one-year American Sign Language program, and another decided she wanted to be a speech pathologist.

Chapter Six → *"The Transition to University"*

Near the end of Grade 12, a health issue came up and I had to have an operation. That forced me to make some important decisions. Either I could graduate with my friends but I wouldn't complete all my courses and have to return in the fall for one semester; or, I could drop my courses and wait until the following year to graduate. It was difficult decision for me but I decided to graduate with my friends and return to high school the following fall.

So I had a great time at grad with my friends. Then they all went off to university, and I had to return to high school to complete the courses I had withdrawn from. Fortunately, there were two other girls I knew from my previous year at Hillside who had to return to make up credits as well. That final semester I took courses that would help me with my application to University. I was accepted.

Before starting university, I took the opportunity to spend some time in Whistler. At the time, a friend was living there. She invited me for a visit and I went. I met so many people. They were all hearing of course.

It was a real awakening for me. I had my first boyfriend and I was really enjoying the party scene. So, part of me began to struggle with whether to go to university or whether to stay in Whistler and enjoy myself. But I began to realize that it was a real struggle always interacting with hearing people. Dating hearing guys, I began to experience communication breakdowns and the frustrations that resulted from that. They didn't understand about Deaf culture – for example, how to get someone's attention. They didn't get it and they didn't have the patience. At parties and in large groups, I struggled. I couldn't follow what was going on. I wasn't comfortable and I started feeling more and more left out. This was the beginning of a change: the desire to get involved with Deaf people. So, I decided to leave Whistler, begin my degree at university, and get more involved with Deaf people

Chapter Seven – University Years

Early on, I had a goal of being a marine biologist. Unfortunately, math had not been a strong area for me; so, I hadn't taken grade 12 math. This became a problem. I met with a committee at the university, and they explained that I couldn't get into the sciences, unless I had Math. Consequently, without the sciences, I wouldn't be able to pursue my goal of being a marine biologist. I was pretty upset about that but I got into university and adjusted my

goals. My dad and I investigated other options and discovered that I could get into marine resource management.

University life . . . I was all on my own – independent – and like high school, I had to do double the work. In university I would sit there watching the interpreter all class, and the information wouldn't always stick. So, I would go home and spend time recopying any notes from the notetaker to help me learn and remember the information. It was a lot of hard work.

Again, looking back at this time in my life it was a transition period for me – transitioning from the hearing world into the Deaf world. Really, I've always been around deaf people. For that matter, I've always been around hearing people too, but I guess I never really felt included in either. Now in university I started hanging out with Deaf people and working at fitting in, being included, and making connections. I particularly started spending more and more time with a Deaf guy who I had grown up with. I had known him since kindergarten. After spending increasing time together we started liking each other. Then, during my sophomore year we began dating and fell in love.

We were together three years and travelled to Europe together. Eventually our relationship ended in a very painful way. It was a difficult time for me but one thing I learned from that experience was that having a Deaf boyfriend was so much better than a hearing boyfriend.

Ever since, I've had a Deaf boyfriend. I just know it's better. Fluent communication is there. You don't have to rely on oral communication. You can sign. Everything is there. We're the same and have similar needs. But one thing I'm seeing more clearly now is that my future husband should probably have some oral background. The reason I say that is because I've noticed that when I'm arguing I tend to revert to my first language. It's automatic. I start talking orally and then I start to sign. I've had people tell me that it's typical of people who speak more than one language: when they argue they revert to their first language too.

So this period of my life I learned a lot about myself and a lot about friendships. I learned about hurt and betrayal. I guess the most important thing I learned during these years was that I'm Deaf. I found my identity. And as I already mentioned, I learned that I prefer being in a relationship with a Deaf guy – communication is the reason.

I dated a few Deaf guys and I knew that the issue of communication was resolved, but there were other frustrations. I began to discover that differences in level of education lead to dissatisfaction in the relationship. The issue is that I get bored. Sometimes I feel like being smart is more of a curse than a blessing. Knowing that I want to find a partner who is Deaf, and that I want someone with whom I feel intellectually compatible, I feel like I'm more limited in terms of my choices – both in terms of a future partner and socially, in my friendships.

Chapter Eight "Out in the World"

So, I graduated from university and I was now active in the Deaf community. Now I was out in the world. I was no longer a student; and now, I was in the Deaf world.

At this point in my life, I had completed the marine resource management program, but I was uncertain whether I really wanted that for a career. I'm a people person and I envisioned a career in marine resource management as solitary. And as I reflected on my interests, I knew I wanted to travel. Travelling had been a big part of my life. All through the years – from early family trips, to my three-month backpacking trip in Europe with a friend, to backpacking alone across South East Asia – I've loved travelling. I learned so much through these experiences. In fact, because of my international travel experiences, I discovered that being deaf isn't a bad thing after all. We can communicate better than hearing people who travel in different countries and are so reliant on spoken language. Deaf people know natural gestural language and can tap into natural gestural communication inside.

After so many travel experiences, I realized that I wanted to live in a city with a larger Deaf community. So I decided to move to Vancouver. Once in Vancouver, I began meeting Deaf people here. I started dating and I got involved with local Deaf people. I got a job at a local Deaf organization and I've been there ever since.

During this time in my life, I also began what is now a joy of mine - travelling for Deaf-related events. I've travelled to Gallaudet University. That had a real impact on me. My first International Deaf Olympics was in 1997; and I've been to the World Federation of the Deaf a couple times. One thing I've discovered travelling internationally and meeting so many Deaf people from all over is that there is an overriding acknowledgement that we're all the same. It doesn't matter if you're oral, or you sign. Deaf is deaf and there is this connection. It doesn't matter if you speak another language, you gesture, and you find ways

to communicate. It's just something inside. There's this connection. It's frustrating and hurtful, but not all my interactions with Deaf people have been like that.

Identity politics.

I'm Deaf. That's how I identify myself. But some local Deaf people – the radical, the extreme ones - judge me and criticize me. They're out to oppress people like me. It's damaging to my self-esteem. If they find out that you were raised orally, they label you 'd' deaf. At one Deaf event I attended, one person got up and decided to go around the room and label who was Deaf and who was deaf.

"You're 'D'. You're 'd'. You're 'D'. You're 'd'"

He came to me and he said, "You're 'd'." I've never felt so humiliated and criticized. Some others joined in and they called me 'd' deaf because I have an oral background. They said, "You know you're more oral than you are ASL."

And I was like, "SO WHAT? I'm Deaf! I'm involved in the Deaf community. I'm a leader. My parents are hearing, but I sign. I go to International Deaf events. I've been to the Deaf Olympics. I've been to international conferences. I know more International Sign than any of you do!"

So, I've learned to keep my cued speech background to myself because some Deaf people will judge me because of my background and reject me, "Well, oh yeah Kailyn, you're 'd'eaf." So, I keep that to myself. I don't share that with people. I don't tell anyone unless the time is appropriate and there is trust there.

I think looking back on my life, Deaf identity has been an issue that appears repeatedly and with more significance over time. When I was young I was around other deaf people but I don't think I really understood what it was to be Deaf. I guess it wasn't a big deal. In fact, when I was in elementary school I think I would refer to myself as hard of hearing because I was oral and used two hearing aids. Now I view myself as culturally Deaf. I'm involved in the Deaf community. Most of my friends are Deaf. I'm politically involved in the community. I participate in Deaf sports. I'm Deaf.

Chapter Nine - Current Matters and Aspirations

Someday I hope to meet a Deaf guy with whom I can share my life. Another significant aspiration I have is to attend an American University that has a Deaf program. My prior trip to Gallaudet has inspired this goal.

I returned from Gallaudet as a signing powerhouse. I had totally embraced East Coast sign and was signing at such a rapid pace. It was such an influential trip. I recall telling my sister about what I had experienced and how it had affected me. I realized that I regretted not going to an American University with a strong Deaf program. I've heard stories about other Deaf people's social experiences at Gallaudet and I'm envious. During university I didn't have many social opportunities. I was completely in a hearing world. I had to do double the work because I'm deaf.

My sister was so supportive. She said, "Go to Gallaudet. You know, follow your dreams. Go for it!" But at the same time, she recognized the cost and that I'd have to figure out the money issue. We talked about it and I realized it wasn't a possible dream at this point in my life. Perhaps in the future. . . .

Looking back I see how my values have changed, and recently I've been experiencing increasing conflict in my relationship with my parents. All my life I've communicated with them orally. In the early years, they told people – the professionals – not to sign with me. I was use to strictly oral communication. It's funny because when I was younger a woman who ran a camp for deaf children convinced my mom to let me go to the deaf camp. There were signing kids there, so my mom had some hesitations. She made the leader of the camp promise to make sure that I didn't use sign language. Now as an adult that same woman has told me the story and shared with me that by the end of the week at camp, I was the best signer of all the children. Of course, my mother never found out because she was adamant that I be oral.

Then, as the communication policy changed at school, my parents began to be more accepting of sign language. But I still communicated orally at home and in the classroom. My parents never forbid me to bring my signing friends home. They were always welcome. And they were committed to ensuring that I had access to any equipment that would improve accessibility. I was the first person in the group of deaf kids I grew up with to get a closed captioning machine, a TTY, a computer. . . So they never really denied me anything, except sign language. They've told me that they wanted to give me the option of fitting into the hearing world. But sometimes I wish I had gone to a Deaf school and learned ASL a long time ago. But then I realize that I would be a different person and I am happy with who I am. But I'm not sure my parents understand who I am as a Deaf person.

The recognition that they don't really understand who I am as a Deaf person has been fueled by our discussions about my desire to find a Deaf partner. I've asked them how they're going to communicate with my future husband. And their response has been, "Well, we'll learn sign."

And I'm like, "Wait a minute, you're willing to learn sign for a future boyfriend that you don't even know? What about me?" I've asked, "Why didn't you learn sign language before?"

My mom is really strong about the choices she made for me. She'll say, "You turned out fine. What's the problem?"

I try and explain, "But now as an adult, I use Sign. So why won't you learn Sign and sign with me now as an adult?"

I try not to be critical with the way they raised me. I'm fortunate to have strong literacy skills and to have had a good education. And in some ways I'm happy that I was raised orally because I can go in both worlds. I still face frustrations communicating with hearing people orally at times; but, there have been and are benefits to having oral skills.

I do have some scars because of my history growing up orally, but I also have some scars from feeling rejected and judged in the Deaf community too. What I'm learning is that I have to build my own self-confidence, know who I am and feel secure about that. Besides, I've met people who have grown up in all Deaf families and that's not perfect either. So for me, what it boils down to is family. I think having a supportive, involved family who's not overprotective, makes a huge difference. And I feel very fortunate to have had parents who have invested in me and supported me.

There are some new frustrations. Well, perhaps they've been there all along but they are more evident now. It mostly has to do with communication and being included. At family gatherings it's difficult to follow what's going on with everyone talking. Growing up I was allowed to bring a friend and have company while everyone else had their hearing conversations. I've noticed that bringing a Deaf friend with you to hearing family events is a Deaf coping method. You bring someone with you so that you don't feel isolated and alone. Now as an adult, I'm more often by myself and my family doesn't understand why I may feel more comfortable in a Deaf environment. My family works at making sure I know what's going on, but then sometimes it can be frustrating for them too.

Now as a signing adult, I still am put in the position to have to communicate orally or through written form with my family and extended family. That's why it's become an issue for me when I think about having a long-term relationship with someone who is Deaf. I want him to be able to communicate with my family. I don't want to be put in the position of having to interpret. So, there are some new issues that we are facing, that have emerged because of my transition from a deaf person to a Deaf person. But in the end, even though there are these frustrations, I am thankful to have a loving and supportive family who care about me.

"Maria"

Chapter One → Ages 3 – 4 "The Diagnosis"

This is my life story. My name is Maria. I'm the youngest of three children. I have two older brothers – Tony and Joe. I was born deaf and I'm the only member in my family who is deaf. My parents found out that I was deaf when I was 3 or 4 years old. My mom shared with me the story of how they discovered I was deaf – "The Diagnosis".

Prior to a formal diagnosis, my mom suspected there was something wrong, but in the beginning she dismissed her suspicions because at times it would seem as though I could hear. Sometimes I would respond to sounds, but then other times I wouldn't respond. This caused suspicion that I maybe I was playing games. Eventually, my mom couldn't ignore her suspicion and made an appointment for me to see the doctor. It was at the appointment that my mom found out that it was true. I was deaf.

Despite her early suspicions she was shocked. She was very upset and cried and cried. She wasn't prepared for the news.

She asked the doctor, "Can she learn to talk?"

"Oh, she will never talk." My mom was so upset.

Following the diagnosis they got me hearing aids and enrolled me in an oral preschool in Toronto, Ontario. My mom also took me to a speech therapist once a week. My mom came with me to these appointments to learn how to do exercises with me at home. Over and over again my mom would practice the speech activities with me. I remember her helping me with different phonetics and practicing with me to get the softer sounds. She wanted to make sure that I had clear speech. In fact, she quit her job because of me.

When I've reflected on my childhood I've asked her, "Mom how did you put up with me?"

She said, "Maria, it wasn't easy, but you know I had to be determined, and I decided that that's what had to be done."

Looking back I don't have many memories of my years at the preschool. What's helped me remember a few things are a couple pictures I have of these years. There's one picture of the group of children with Santa Claus. Interestingly, from the group of deaf preschoolers at the oral program, I've met a number of them later as an adult in the Deaf community. There was a group of children from the deaf oral programs who were transferred to E.C. Drury School for the Deaf. NOT ME (Shaking head and held for emphasis) I was an 'oral success.'

Chapter Two → Kindergarten to Grade 3 "Entrance into a Hearing School"

When I was ready for kindergarten, my parents enrolled me at Hollyburn Elementary School – a public hearing school that had an oral deaf class. Part of the day I was integrated in the hearing kindergarten class, and the other part of the day I would take part in the deaf class. In the deaf class we would focus on developing our oral skills – speech, lipreading and auditory training – and English and reading. I remained at this school until the end of grade three when I had to transfer to a different school for grade four because Hollyburn only went to the end of grade three.

Chapter Three → Grades 4 to 6

Grade four I started at a new school – Ridgeview. Similar to Hollyburn, this school had an oral deaf program in it. In fact, there were two oral deaf classes at Ridgeview Elementary School. I remember because one of my friends had two deaf brothers, and they were in the other oral deaf class. Again, I was integrated for some of the subjects, but I don't remember which ones. So, I went back and forth between the hearing classroom and the deaf classroom.

During these years I remember wanting to go to the private Catholic school my brothers attended. I repeatedly pleaded with my mom, "Mom, mom, mom, I want to go to Tony and Joe's school."

"It's not possible. You're special. You need special things."

I didn't understand. She was trying to explain to me that I was different and that I had to go to a school where there was speech therapy. But I wanted to be where my brothers were. I always wanted to follow my brothers. I eventually accepted that I wasn't able to go to their school and just carried on.

Chapter Four → Grade 6 to 7 "Pah! A Local School"

Pah! [Finally!] I started attending my local neighbourhood school when I was in grade six. Prior to this, I was going to schools where there were oral deaf classes. Because these schools were not in my local neighbourhood, each day the Easter Seal bus would come to pick me up. It was a bus that would pick up handicapped kids and take them to their respective special programs. I didn't like taking that bus and Tony, my brother, hated that bus. Kids in the neighbourhood would make fun of me, and Tony was ready to pound them. That's why I wanted to go to a school near my home, because I wanted to be able to walk to school. Now finally in grade six, I was fully integrated at my neighbourhood school and I could walk back and forth between home and school. Two other deaf students also attended this school but there wasn't any kind of deaf program. There were no interpreters, no note takers, no itinerant teachers, nothing (Emphasized). There were no services, no supports!

Looking back I realize that growing up I was immersed in the Italian community. My family is Italian. I went to Italian Girl Scouts. Every Saturday I went to Catholic school. I also learned to play the accordion. My brother who is closest in age to me played the accordion, and once he started learning it, I wanted to as well.

"Mom, Mom, Mom, I want to play the accordion."

"But you can't hear." Finally, she said OK and they gave me the accordion to learn. Of course I was a better accordion player than my brother.

I think I was just trying to survive and pretend that my life was fine. But it wasn't. I felt different. I felt like, "Why did God punish me?" I have to wear hearing aids. I couldn't figure out why I couldn't hear. "Why am I different from everyone else? Why am alone? The only one?"

Growing up I wanted to be the same. I wanted to be the same as hearing people. Wearing hearing aids and oral communication were two things that really called attention to me being different. People… we couldn't understand each other. I couldn't understand what they were saying and they couldn't understand my speech.

One memory that I'll never forget was a camping trip with the girl scouts. I had to be so alert because I couldn't hear without my hearing aids… terrifying. At night people would be talking but I couldn't follow what was being said in the dark. I couldn't hear what was being talked about. I would just follow people. Of course that's just normal deaf behaviour. You try and figure out what's going on in the environment and you just pretend that you know what's going on – it's a survival skill.

Chapter Five → *High School "On my own!"*

In grade eight, I started high school at Sentinel Hill. There were two other deaf girls who started at the same high school as me, but shortly into the school year, they left. One moved away and the other quit school… I think. But again, there was no deaf program – NOTHING! I was fully integrated without any supports: no itinerant teacher, no interpreter, NOTHING!

Did I have many friends? NO! I did have two close hearing friends from the neighbourhood; but that was it, and they weren't in all my classes. At school, kids would ask me, "What country are you from?" Really, I was born in Canada, but they asked me because my speech sounded different. So, I refused to speak.

Then each September, it was the same scenario. I would choose a seat at the back of the class, trying to be inconspicuous. Then, "Maria? Maria where are you?" Every September, "Maria, sit in the front." It was the RULE.

Grade 8, I seemed to make my way through; Grade 9 too. I was fortunate to have an excellent guidance counsellor, but there weren't any special supports related to my hearing loss. I was fully integrated and I had to survive by lipreading. Some teachers were more understanding than others. Looking back it seems the older teachers didn't have patience with me.

My God. I remember one teacher, Miss Black, I'll never forget her. She would show movies in class. I can't hear. There was no captioning, no note taker. I didn't have anything. So, I had to survive by trying to lipread as much as I could.

Then in grade 10, it really hit me. I was totally O-U-T [lost]. I was increasingly falling behind. I started skipping classes and making excuses like, my hearing aids weren't working. I found any excuse to miss class. I was very frustrated. In fact, one day I went home

and told my mom, "I'm going to quit school. I'm fed up. I can't cope." She was really concerned and didn't know what to do.

Then in grade 11, I was taken to a big meeting – all these adults sitting around a table asking me questions. They asked me to describe my courses. Shortly following that meeting an itinerant teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing started working with me. She came to the school 2 – 3 times a week to work with me.

They must have been concerned because a couple times I got called to the nurse's office to meet with a psychologist. He'd ask me all these questions but I wasn't honest with him about what I was going through. I was like, "Fine. Everything's fine. There's no problem." But was it really fine? NO! It wasn't.

I was really aware that I was different from the other students in high school. I had hearing aids. No one else in the school had a hearing aid. "Why did I have a hearing aid? Why did I talk funny? Why did I talk differently than the other kids?" On the outside I worked to portray, "I'm fine. I'm fine." But it was like I was wearing a mask and just keeping up the appearance that I was fine. I never told the other kids that I was deaf. I wore my hair long over my shoulders to cover my hearing aids. I never had long conversations with people. I would keep conversations short. I was sometimes envious of people wondering, "What are they saying? What are they talking about?"

In grade 11, my itinerant teacher told me about a deaf program where the students and teachers used sign language. She took me to visit this deaf program for one week. When I arrived I was somewhat overwhelmed. All the deaf students used sign. I saw a girl from one of my former oral classes. She came over and talked with me a little bit but then went back to join her friends. She was a signer now. I attended this signing program for one week and after the week, my itinerant teacher asked, "So, what do you think?"

"Well, I'm almost finished grade 11. I only have one more year. I'm used to my teachers. I don't understand sign." So I stayed at Sentinel Hill. I didn't identify with those kids. They were signers. I didn't want to see myself similar to them.

Then near the end of grade 12 my itinerant teacher and I were discussing my future. I told her I wanted to go to College. She told me about Gallaudet. In fact she arranged for me to meet with a Deaf college student who attended Gallaudet. I found it really interesting and

thought, "Hey, I'm going to try it." So I filled out the application and wrote the entrance exam.

Chapter Six – "Entrance into the Deaf World"

When my mom first heard about Gallaudet she made it clear that she didn't want me to go. She hoped that I would fail the entrance exam, but I didn't. I was elated! Finally, my mom conceded and supported my desire to attend Gallaudet University. Later, I discovered that my brother, Tony, had convinced my mom to let me go. "You have to let her go! Let Maria go! Let go!"

So, the summer after high school I made my way to Gallaudet University. I went early before the fall term so that I could participate in the three-week New Signers Program [NSP]. I was really homesick but I decided to think positive and stick it out. NSP really impacted me because all the other students were hard of hearing, like me. It was the first time that I realized that I wasn't the only one. I wasn't alone. It was odd because some of the students didn't want to learn ASL. But me? I was really motivated and I set my goal to learn ASL. "Despite the frustration I'm going to learn sign."

Then in September I started my prep/freshman year at Gallaudet. I worked hard at school; but at the same time I was realizing that I had missed out on so much in high school, and I felt that something was owed to me. Now it was time for me to have some fun.

They wanted to put me in a French Honours course because I had already taken French in high school. But I was like, "No. I want a regular French class." I didn't want too much work. I wanted to enjoy the new social opportunities. I kept up on my schoolwork but my priority was my social life because I had missed out on so much.

Then Christmas . . . I went home to Ontario for the holidays. Interestingly, when I stepped off the plane I went back to being the old Maria, my old self. I wore my hair down over my ears to cover my hearing aids, the old ashamed Maria. At Gallaudet I was an outgoing crazy person. I was two different people, two different characters with different personalities: the "old Ontario Maria" and "Gallaudet Maria." It was like someone was turning a switch on and off. When I went to Gallaudet, my true colours came out.

In Ontario, I didn't let people know that I was hard of hearing. In fact, many of the people I grew up with didn't know that I was hard of hearing. When people talked to me, I would pretend that I understood what was going on. I would just answer, "Yeah." I'd

pretend. I'd answer yes or no. And I would think to myself, "Geeze Maria, be careful what you answer yes to."

Those years at Gallaudet I took all of the required courses. You have to take the humanities and a foreign language; and then in your sophmore year, you declare your major. I was interested in majoring in computer science but I realized that I'd have to communicate with hearing people. I felt, "What are my chances? I'd have to compete with hearing people in the hearing world." So instead, I decided to major in elementary education and become a teacher of the deaf. A major motivating factor in my decision was my own personal experiences growing up. I wanted to help deaf children.

The teacher of the deaf program at Gallaudet was really strict. Prior to getting into the program you had to pass a really tough English test and go through an interview that explored why you wanted to be a teacher of the deaf. I went through the process and was accepted into the program, but then everything got screwed up. I was working at the tutoring centre, taking too many courses, and I didn't want to 'just pass'. I wanted to do well. The effect was that I burned out. I lost my motivation.

After discussions with one of my teachers, I decided to take a break and return home for a while until I was ready to get back at it again. So I withdrew and took an incomplete on my courses for a short time. My friends hadn't realized that I was burnt out like that. I am so good at covering up when things aren't going well. I presented like everything was fine. What motivated me to get back to Gallaudet was the lingering 'incomplete.' So I went back in January and finished my courses.

Looking back, I realize that that professor really took an interest in me and was concerned about my well-being. His encouragement helped me take some needed time off; and when I was ready, I went back and finished the program. I graduated.

What's more, I discovered a new Maria. At Gallaudet, I felt good about myself. I discovered a social person with more confidence. After Gallaudet I would meet hearing people and tell them, "I'm hard of hearing." I don't think I would have done that if I hadn't have gone to Gallaudet. I don't know what my life would have been like if I hadn't ever have gone to Gallaudet.

Chapter Seven → *"Identity Politics"*

So after Gallaudet, I came away with a new identity. I guess audiologically speaking I'm hard of hearing, but I identify myself as culturally Deaf. Of course, there are the politics in the Deaf community. You know some Deaf people will label me hard of hearing, but well, what does that mean? Yes, I grew up oral. I didn't grow up in a school for the deaf, but it's just terminology.

I do have oral skills, but I don't broadcast it. For me, it's not a big deal. I know that some hard of hearing people think they are better than Deaf people because they can speak. But from my perspective, I don't think that it's oral skills that are important. I think it's literacy skills; and I know Deaf people who can't speak, but who have way better literacy skills than those hard of hearing people who brag that they can speak. I think the problem is that some hard of hearing people continue to cover up their hearing loss. They still want to be hearing (THINK-HEARING) and then they don't fit in.

Chapter Eight – "Post Gallaudet Requirements"

After graduating from Gallaudet, I attended York University in Ontario. I received my bachelor's degree in education but I didn't have the necessary qualifications to teach deaf and hard of hearing children. So I went back to school to earn my diploma specializing in deaf education. It wasn't a great experience. It was a piece of paper that meant I could get a job.

One issue was that I had problems with interpreters. Even my classmates noticed that the interpretation was lousy. I complained but there was no change. Then there was the emphasis on speech. I didn't want to focus on speech; I wanted to focus on signing, but there wasn't a choice. They didn't have anything for sign. Looking back, it's clear that the program was influenced by the historical context and the trends in deaf education. So I found myself teaching speech every Saturday at a speech clinic. One thing that interested me was that I became a role model for the hard of hearing kids I was teaching. "Wow, Maria is hard of hearing." But it was a very odd experience. We'd do exercises like practicing sounds: "Boo, boo, boo." "Baa, baa, baa." "Boo, boo, boo." "Baa, baa, baa." And I couldn't even hear if they were saying it right. Finally I completed the diploma. I got my piece of paper and I was now qualified to be a teacher of the deaf.

Chapter Nine → *"Developing My Professional Deaf Identity"*

Once I completed the program, there were eventually two job openings: one was a full time position in a small town in Ontario and the other was a part time position at E.C. Drury. Confronted with having to make a decision, I was significantly influenced by my desire to live in an area where there was a Deaf community. So I accepted the position at E.C. Drury and I've been there ever since.

One big change that has occurred during my career was the move to integrate the high school deaf program with the hearing high school. Historically, E.C. Drury was a residential and day program for deaf and hard of hearing students. However, in the early 80s a hearing high school was built just next to E.C. Drury. This initiated the integration of the deaf program into the hearing high school. There have been both pro's and con's to the move. One thing that happens is that when Deaf programs integrate with hearing programs, there is a tendency for Deaf issues to become overlooked/minimized because of the ratio of hearing to deaf. But there are more choices and more options for the kids and more opportunities for mainstreamed experiences. One of my big concerns, however, is the issue of identity. I don't want it to get lost or watered down.

Another issue very important to me is that the kids have opportunities to develop confidence. So finding opportunities and experiences that foster the development of self-confidence is valuable. Involvement in performances that celebrate Deaf culture is one way that this can be achieved. From my perspective, opportunities to be in front of people and develop confidence are so important. I know this because I find it very difficult to be up in front of people. I had bad experiences in high school when I had to stand up in front of the class and give a presentation, speak it. I didn't have the confidence in my speech and I thought I would be judged because of my speech. So I think it's beneficial for the younger kids to have positive public speaking experiences so that they can develop self-confidence. Drama/performance in the Deaf community is very important and we need to make sure that the deaf children continue to have these opportunities. In addition to self-confidence, it instills a confidence in their language, ASL. They get exposed to important aspects of their culture, their language – and that's great.

I guess when I think about my own experience growing up, I realize the things that I missed and how it affected me. Now in my professional role, I believe I can make a

difference and I'm committed to the children I teach. I want them to have self-confidence and feel good about being Deaf. So I think it's important that they have exposure to Deaf role models and the traditions of the Deaf community.

It's interesting because when I first moved back to Ontario, I tried to get involved in the Deaf community, but I was still too shy. I didn't know where to meet Deaf people or how to introduce myself. It wasn't until I started teaching at E.C. Drury that I started meeting some Deaf people. Then I met one woman who basically dragged me into the Deaf community. She got me involved in the Toronto Association of the Deaf (T.A.D.). It was as though I needed somebody to lead me and introduce me to people. Once I started meeting people, I was like, "Hey I've seen you before. I know you. Wow! We were in the same deaf oral program when we were small."

Eventually, I got to know more and more people. But unfortunately some Deaf people look down on you when they find out you grew up orally. So it did take a long time for them to accept me and for me to break through into the community. Better late than never!

So I got involved with the various Deaf sports events, the T.A.D,, and all those things; but really, my life has been focused on the school and teaching. Increasingly, my role in the community is more complicated because my former students are now active in the Deaf community. More and more it happens when one of them will approach me at a community event and say, "Hey you were my teacher." And so sometimes it can be hard because there can be conflicts between my social life in the Deaf community and my professional role as a teacher. So I'm very close with many of the Deaf staff at the school. We support each other because we have to live with those boundary issues.

In closing, when I look back on my life, I can tell you that I'm happy with who I am. I'm Deaf. You might call me hard of hearing, but really it's terminology. Before, my identity was confused. I was very confused about my hearing loss. I was afraid that people would discover I was hard of hearing, so I hid that I had a hearing loss. I thought people would treat me differently or something. I thought they would judge me because I was different. But now, today, I can be out in the open, out of the closet. I'm me and I'm proud to be me.

"Deborah"

Chapter One → *"She is deaf."*

This is my life story. My name is Deborah. I was born deaf and I'm the only deaf person in my family. I grew up living with my mom, dad and my younger brother, Steve. My family is Italian. So Italian culture has played a large role in my life – particularly the importance that is placed on family.

When I was thinking about my life story, I realized that an important piece of my story was when my parents discovered that I was deaf. Of course this happened when I was about one. So I don't have any personal memories of this time, but I do have my mom's story. She shared with me the story of how she discovered I was deaf.

It's my understanding that when I was born my parents didn't know I was deaf. But when I was 4 ½ months, my grandfather shared with my grandmother his suspicion that I couldn't hear.

My mom's side of the family is very close and I saw my grandparents everyday. In fact, my father bought the house next to my mom's parents because he felt it was important for her to be near her mom and dad. Their frequent contact allowed them to monitor the situation; and then when I was one, my grandmother approached my mom, "You know, your daughter, she has a hearing problem."

My mom was in denial, but my grandma's comment caused her concern. When we arrived home from my grandma's, my mom took a pot and pan and banged them together behind me to see if I would respond. I didn't.

Worried and wanting to confirm that everything was OK, my mom took me to a doctor. The doctor told her, "She's fine. There's nothing wrong with her hearing."

My mom was confused and explained, "Well look, I was at home banging a pot and pan behind her and she didn't respond."

"No, no, she's fine."

The doctor suggested that maybe I was having difficulties hearing because I breathed so loudly. In order to remedy this, she suggested that I have my tonsils and adenoids removed. So when I was 20 months I had an operation to remove my tonsils and adenoids. Nothing changed. I still wasn't responding to sound!

Having continued concerns, my mom took me to an ear, nose and throat specialist. By this time she had a gut feeling that, in fact, something was wrong. This specialist conducted a hearing test and told my mom straight up, "Your daughter is deaf."

My mom was shocked. "What should I do now?"

The doctor told my mom about a program in Portland. He said that it was a good program for parents who have deaf children. Of course, a major difficulty was the distance. Portland was so far away. So my mom relied on correspondence with the professionals in that program. It was a good program and they did their best to support her long distance through letter writing.

Shortly after discovering I was deaf, however, my mom found out about an auditory/oral program, a resource right here, in the city. Actually, my aunt discovered it and told my mom. What happened was my aunt was out walking when she noticed a young girl wearing hearing aids. My aunt approached the little girl and tried to communicate with her. The girl's mother came and my aunt explained, "My niece has the same hearing aids as your daughter." It was that woman who told my aunt about the program for deaf and hard of hearing children. She was curious to find out that there were resources here, so she asked the woman, "Where is this program?"

"Well, it's near Vancouver General Hospital." That was right near our home. So my parents investigated and decided to enroll me in the auditory/oral preschool.

Chapter Two → *"The Sound of Music"*

I was enrolled at an oral program when I was 2 ½ years old. I was an independent child who was extremely interested in the sounds around me. Well, that was once I started wearing hearing aids. The first time I heard sound, however, I was terrified. My mom remembers that after they first put the hearing aids on me and turned them on, my body shook and I screamed. It seems that the volume was too high. So they turned the hearing aids off, lowered the volume, and then gradually increased it so that I could get used to hearing sounds. After that initial experience I became fascinated with sound and wanted to wear my hearing aids all the time. I was diagnosed with a profound hearing loss but because of the nature of my hearing loss, I was able to hear and differentiate between sounds with hearing aids.

When I reflect on my years at the oral program for deaf and hard of hearing children, I only have a few faint memories. Pictures of my preschool days help me to remember a little, but I was very young. Of course beginning early and continuing on through elementary school, speech training, auditory training, and of course, hearing tests were frequent. However, what really stands out in my mind from my preschool years is my enthrallment with sound and music. So many of the activities at preschool revolved around music. I have pictures of me dancing, of placing my ear against a piano, and of feeling the piano's vibrations with my hands. I was fascinated by music. I liked listening to the sound of drums and I loved to dance. Sound was predominant in my life because between the ages 3 and 5, the professionals really emphasized the importance of auditory training at this stage.

My mom told me that when I'd hear something I'd get her attention and ask, "What's that sound?"

"Well, it's a plane."

Other times, if something happened in the environment my mom would say, "Deborah, Deborah, look. What's that? Can you hear that?" Or, my mom would point out the sound of a car. My mom really tried to help me recognize and distinguish between different sounds. She also helped me with my speech throughout my childhood – and even still today. Every time I said a word wrong or pronounced it differently, she would help and correct me. "No this is how you say it." My brother would do that too. It wasn't embarrassing for me. It was normal for us – a habit. I'm really thankful to my mom for that. She's been a very important person in my life and I value her support over the years.

There was a policy at the oral program for parents to set aside time to sit down with their preschoolers and do auditory training. My mom, she knew that a two-, three-year-old girl wouldn't be interested in a sit-down structured lesson. So instead, she found other ways to encourage communication.

The first word I ever spoke was ball. My mom told me that the way I spoke the word ball almost sounded like a normal hearing person, unlike other deaf children, who you can tell are deaf from their speech. But my speech almost sounded like a hearing person, so it really made me stand out compared to all the other students. Because of this, the professionals at the oral program would get me to speak for visiting parents of newly diagnosed deaf children. In a way it's like the program kind of used me; well not used me,

but they wanted to show the new parents that their child had the potential to develop clear speech like me. This happened in the years after preschool as well. I have many memories of speaking to people I didn't know. I would talk, talk, talk... they would ask me questions and I would speak back. I was really naïve.

I had a very close friend in preschool, Sheryl. She was the same as me, an oral deaf girl. We were always partners in school and I would invite her to my birthday parties. Oral communication was really tough, so our communication included gesture. Of course that wasn't allowed but that's how we communicated. In fact, it was forbidden. At school it was a very serious policy: both gesture and sign were forbidden. Ironically, before entering kindergarten I learned how to fingerspell my ABC's from other deaf children who rode my school bus. I can't remember the details, but I know that I knew how to fingerspell the ABCs very early. And I knew never to show my parents and that it was forbidden in school.

In addition to my involvement at the oral program, another significant aspect of my preschool years was my family. As I mentioned before, my family is very close. We are Italian and a strong value is placed on family in Italian culture. When I was 1 ½ to 2 years old we moved to a house that my father had built. It was only 5 minutes away from my mom's parents. So we frequently spent time with my grandparents and my mom's family, especially on Sundays when we would have family dinners together. An important friend then was my cousin Anita. She is one year younger than me. My family spent a lot of time together. So Anita and I have been playmates from a very early age.

One friend that really stands out in my early years was a hearing neighbour girl, Mary. Of course I had my friends at the oral program, and my cousin Anita; but Mary and I were so tight. We were always together on the weekends and after school. We always hung out. At that time, communication with hearing people was somewhat shaky. Some hearing children had a difficult time understanding me. But Mary knew me well. She knew I was deaf and she understood my communication needs.

Chapter 3 – "Introduction to the Hearing World – Best Friends! Kindergarten to Grade 2"

When I was six years old, I was enrolled in a hearing school near my home. I was mainstreamed in a hearing kindergarten for half of the day but unlike a hearing child's experience, I attended school all day. I attended kindergarten in the morning. Then when class was finished, my mom would pick me up and take me home for lunch. After lunch, I

would go to a different hearing school and attend a grade one oral deaf class. After this year, I was fully integrated in my neighbourhood school.

Kindergarten was pretty easy for me. I already knew my alphabet, numbers... I had already learned that information during the three years at the oral preschool program. In fact, kindergarten, grade one and grade two, I was ahead of the hearing children in my class. I was a very happy go lucky child and school was really easy for me. I had been well prepared and I had been exposed to a lot of the curriculum previously. Also, I had very good lipreading skills, good auditory differentiation, and clear speech. So, communication didn't seem to be a big issue for me. In fact, one memory that stands out in my mind from the early elementary years was a fundraising event for the oral program I attended. There were 500 people in attendance. I was asked to give a small speech on behalf of the program. I was escorted to the stage and once on stage I spoke into the microphone saying, "All of the children from [the program] thank you very much." That was my famous speech. Everyone applauded. It was very exciting. I didn't really understand it at the time but they asked me to speak because of my voice. I spoke so clearly compared to other students who you could identify as being deaf when they spoke.

In grade one an oral deaf class was started at my school. Now, there were other oral deaf children attending my school. I was still integrated in the hearing class but at breaks – recess and lunch – I would play and socialize with the other deaf children because we were the *same*. There was a connection. We weren't necessarily the same age – there were some younger and some older – but that didn't matter. We'd find each other. Of course communication wasn't easy. We weren't allowed to sign. It was forbidden. We had to try to speak and use oral communication.

Through the years, many of the deaf children transferred to other schools. Some transferred to a signing program and others transferred to their local neighbourhood school. With the exception of a few of the deaf children who remained at my school, I eventually lost contact with the deaf children from my early school years. Interestingly, as an adult, I've met many of them in the Deaf community.

So, as I mentioned these early elementary years - kindergarten to grade two – were easy for me. I had received a good foundation and was prepared for what I had to learn. Of course, I faced some frustrations but I accepted this as my life. I just accepted that it was hard

work. But then at the end of grade two, things started to change. The hearing kids were catching up to me and I was not used to that. I began facing increasing frustrations in school. In addition to the increasing frustration in school, another big change took place when my good friend Mary moved away to California. Her parents were tired of the rain and wanted to move where there was sun. I don't think I actually realized that she was gone for good, but I'm sure a part of me became aware over time that this was a big change. Mary and I have corresponded over the years. We've kept in contact and are still close. It was a loss that she moved away. Mary was a really important person in my life.

Chapter Four – "Grade School – grades 3 to 7"

Mary was gone and grade three was a lot more difficult for me. Fortunately, I did have my neighbour friends – Carie, Casandra, and John. They were my classmates. We hung out together and I assumed that life would carry on.

During these years certain events stand out in my mind. One highlight in grade 3 was getting our dog, Sparky, a labrador retriever. He was really important in my life. He was very intelligent. In fact, that dog knew I was deaf. He would stay right by my side if I was alone. He even learned how to come and wake me up in the mornings for school. That was a big help to my mom because she didn't have to stop preparing breakfast and lunch for us in the morning to wake me up. Sparky was a great dog. Other things that stand out are joining Brownies; having braces put on and then taken off in grade seven; having my first crush on a boy in my class; and being diagnosed with scoliosis at age 13.

Another interest that emerged during years – it must have been grade 4 or 5 – was a desire to participate in the school band. My cousin Anita had started playing the flute. I always copied her. So, I approached the band instructor and said, "You know, I really want to play flute."

His response was, "No, you're deaf. You need to hear to play the flute."

So I asked, "Is there any instrument that I can play?"

"Well, the clarinet."

"Ok. I'll try that."

So my mom went out and bought me a clarinet and I played in the school band until graduating from high school. I had this "can-do" attitude. I was a very determined girl when I

was growing up; and if wanted to do something, I would do it. I would try. I wouldn't let deafness get in my way.

As always, the importance of family was a central feature of these years. My extended family – my mom's family - continued to be close. I would see my grandparents and my mom's sisters' families every week. Really, my own family life wasn't that great. My dad was an alcoholic and he was verbally and emotionally abusive. I guess being deaf was a benefit because I couldn't hear what my father said. I couldn't hear how he treated my mom. I didn't realize what my mom was going through, and it wasn't until later that I fully understood that being deaf had protected me from hearing how hurtful and abusive my father was. Sparky was a wonderful distraction as well. He was a wonderful dog.

My family also took a couple trips during these years. Twice we travelled to Italy, once when I was 7 years old and once when I was 13 years old. While in Italy we visited relatives on both my parents' sides of the family. My dad came with us to Italy but he didn't join us on our other family holiday to California.

My grandparents, my mom, Steve, and my cousin Anita's family took a bus holiday to Disneyland. They had activities to keep the children busy. Of course, there was music and singing, but I'm deaf and I couldn't understand the music. Instead, my mom made sure that there were other activities that I could enjoy. It was a fun, enjoyable trip. My mom always made sure that I was included. Whenever there was something that necessitated hearing, my mom would help me. She would translate what people were saying, what was going on. She made sure that I wouldn't miss out on anything. This was my life. I accepted it and I went with it.

As for school life, I continued to be mainstreamed. I was the only deaf student in my classroom. School life was busy. I didn't go out on the weekends because I had to focus on my homework and study. I had so much homework everyday. Everyday it was the same thing. I'd finish school, come right home, do my homework, and study. I had to in order to keep up with the hearing kids.

The oral deaf class no longer existed at my school. Many of the other deaf students, with the exception of four oral deaf students, had transferred to other schools. The four remaining deaf students were all in different grades, but we had an itinerant teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing who would work with us. She focused on speech, lipreading and

auditory training. She would take us out of our hearing classes when the hearing students were learning French. She would say, "You can't learn French. It's too tough for you." So we would meet with her 2 to 3 times a week as a group. She also spent time with us individually.

Initially, I accepted that this was the way things were. But then over time, I increasingly became resistant to having to leave my class and work with Marie Smith[26]. In grade 7, I really started disliking her. The way she treated me made me feel like a little girl. I got to the point where I had enough of her. She talked to me about her personal life which I didn't appreciate. Also, she was abusive to me during auditory training exercises. In one exercise she would sit behind me and ask me to listen and differentiate between two sounds – "eee" and "ooo". She wanted me to tell her which sound she was making but I couldn't tell the difference. They sound the same to me. If I answered wrong, she would hit me on the back of my shoulder. I felt frustrated and agitated with her. She would smack me on the back of my shoulder and say, "You know better than that. You know better. You know better." So I would sit there and try to guess which sound she was saying, hoping that I would guess it right so she wouldn't smack me on the back. That really influenced my relationship with her. I just didn't like her.

The other issue that made me dislike my time with her was being removed from my classroom. I really wanted to be involved in the hearing class. I wanted to learn what they were studying. One time, I'll never forget. I left class. The deaf students were already sitting there with Marie. I came to the door and Marie said in an annoying prissy tone, "Hi, little darling, come and sit down. I'm going to read a little story."

Enough. "I'm not your little girl. I'd rather be in my class than listen to your stupid story."

She was mad and told me to leave.

"Fine." I walked out and returned to my class.

My teacher was shocked, "What are you doing here?"

"I don't want to leave class. I want to be here, learning social studies."

My teacher said, "Oh, I'm happy to have you stay in class."

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[26] It is important to note that all names of people, cities, and agencies have been changed in order to address concerns of confidentiality. Marie Smith is not the name used by the participant when referring to her itinerant teacher. The name was chosen arbitrarily.

That day I went home and told my mom how much I hated Marie Smith. Unfortunately, I had to put up with her until the end of grade 7. Then, just before grade 7 finished, Marie told me, "I'm so excited. I'm going to be your teacher in high school."

I arrived home from school and told my mom, "Mom, I don't want Marie Smith to be my teacher in high school. She told me that she's going to be my teacher in grade 8. I can't stand her. I don't want her. No way. I'll refuse to see her."

My mom didn't know what to do. She knew I was a stubborn girl. She knew she had to do something.

I explained, "All we do with Marie is focus on speech and listening skills. I've had enough." By grade 5 my speech was perfect. People didn't know that I was deaf because my speech sounded like hearing speech. My mom would tell me, "Your voice is perfect. You can't tell by your voice that you're deaf." I had very clear speech. My lipreading was perfect. I was almost like a normal person. There was no point in seeing Marie anymore. Plus, I couldn't stand her. However, my mom knew that high school was going to be tough and she was worried that I needed support. So, my mom investigated and found a way to get a different itinerant teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing who would meet with me regularly to see how I was doing and provide extra support.

Chapter 5 – "High School"

One unfortunate thing happened prior to starting high school. Near the end of grade 7, it came to my attention that I was enrolled at Elliot High School. Most of my close friends from elementary school were going to Lansdale High. I was so upset and explained to my mom how important it was for me to be with my friends. Again because of my mom's support and tenacity, I was able to attend high school with my friends. An exception was made because this was a special case – me being deaf. I was so relieved to find out the good news. What I didn't realize, however, was that although some of my friends were at the same high school, this didn't ensure that we were in the same class.

The high school was so big. I felt lost and very nervous. "Oh my God, what am I going to do?" There were so many new faces. I didn't tell any of them that I was deaf. I felt if I told them – especially teenagers – they'd be like, "Oh you're deaf, gasp!" And they'd be afraid that maybe they would catch it, or I'd give it to them. Or maybe, they'd feel awkward

and not know how to relate to me. I didn't want their pity because I'm deaf. So I never told them I was deaf. I just carried on with my life and tried to make it through.

High school was challenging, but I do have some neat memories that stand out. One example was when my two good friends, Carrie and my cousin Anita, surprised me for my sweet-sixteen-birthday party. Other great memories from high school were the high school band trips that I was able to participate in. I really enjoyed band. The teacher was easy to follow. Of course he knew I was deaf, but it didn't matter. He made sure that I was included. He allowed me to play solos a few times and I was involved in a band competition. He treated me the same as the other kids. His attitude was, "You have skills. That's all that's important."

Another high school activity I participated in was a weekly three-month ski program sponsored by the school. I had to take advantage of school activities because my mom never really let me out with my friends unless it was a school event. She was over-protective of me. My mom did let me go to San Francisco by myself for a two-week vacation to visit Mary, my childhood friend. That was when I was in high school. That, too, is a great memory for me. So I have some neat memories from my high school years.

So after the initial shock of high school, I settled in and took on the challenge of the high school years. I was the only deaf student at Lansdale at that time. There weren't any interpreters. I had to rely on my oral skills to get through. Ms. Jones, the itinerant teacher, spent time with me during study block. She primarily helped me with homework and made sure that I was managing all right.

One year, in grade 10, Ms. Jones told me about another school that had a program for oral deaf students. I had known about the program at Bayridge and knew some of the kids there, but I hadn't thought about attending there. Ms. Jones, thinking it might be good for me to be with other oral deaf kids, encouraged me to think about a transfer to that program.

I went home and told my mom, "Mom I want to go to Bayridge. My friends are there. I'm the same as them. They're oral deaf just like me. I want to go to Bayridge." But my mom didn't like that idea because that high school had a bad reputation. She preferred me to stay at Lansdale.

"Why would you move to Bayridge? Everything is going fine at Lansdale." She was concerned that I'd get caught up in the social life and my education would suffer. My mom

didn't realize that I really wanted to go to Bayridge. She thought maybe they were forcing me to go to that school and wondered if there was something wrong at Lansdale that she didn't know about. Because of that, she called a meeting of all my teachers and told the counsellor that she did not want Ms. Jones to be at the meeting.

"Did you treat my daughter as a deaf person or did you treat her equally to all the other students? I want to know why my daughter wants to move to Bayridge and doesn't want to come back to Lansdale."

My teachers were shocked and said, "No. We grade her the same as normal. We don't treat her differently because she's deaf. We assess what her skills are, and she's treated equal to the other kids."

My mom realized that Ms. Jones was trying to convince me to transfer to Bayridge. Ms. Jones thought that being the only deaf student at Lansdale, I would feel isolated and that it would be good for me to be in a school with other deaf kids, like me. However, my mom's perspective was that I was doing well. Socializing wasn't a priority. "You're doing fine." But in the back of my mind I was thinking about the other program, the deaf kids there, and wanting to go to Bayridge.

I stayed at Lansdale. I survived, but it was tough. I had to get used to each individual teacher and how they spoke and moved their lips. It was hard work. I had to be assertive if I didn't understand, and say, "Look I didn't understand this," or ask another student.

My English 12 teacher was the worst. I couldn't lipread her at all. I went to my counsellor and explained, "I don't want that teacher. I can't lipread what she's saying. I'm really frustrated. I want to change to a different English teacher. If I don't finish this course, I won't be able to graduate. I can't understand her… There are other English classes. It's easy. Put me in a different class."

What I didn't realize was that each teacher had to give their permission to have me in their class because I'm different – handicapped – well, deaf. That was the policy. I didn't know that policy existed until after graduation, but it made me wonder which teachers would have accepted me in their class, and who wouldn't.

So, Ms. Jones was there at the high school to assist me with homework and help me through the academic process. I was accepting of her role until grade 11. I was getting frustrated with having to use my study block to meet with her. I wanted to do my homework

and study, not sit with her and talk about how things were going. I felt like I was wasting my study block. At about the same time, Ms. Jones began talking to me about Gallaudet University and encouraging me to go there.

"Gallaudet University? I've never heard of it."

She explained, "Well, it's a university for the deaf. And it's really good."

It sounded interesting to me. So, I told my mom that I wanted to go there. "It's a university for the deaf."

"Deaf? I've never heard of it" If she had known that it was a signing university, she would have been totally against it but we didn't know that at the time. So, I took the entrance exam in grade 12. I answered all the questions. I was surprised because it was very easy. I began to wonder if it was a hard university. So my mom grabbed the opportunity to investigate more about the school. She discovered it was a signing school.

"You know that school, Gallaudet? It's a signing school."

"Really? I don't sign."

I went up to Ms. Jones and said, "Hey Ms. Jones, that school is for signing students. I don't sign. I don't have experience signing. What are you talking about? I'm oral. Give me a break. I don't use sign language."

Ms. Jones said, "They have oral students. Students like you who were raised orally. You can take a class to learn sign."

"Why do you want me to go to that university?" I was totally puzzled. "I grew up oral. I'm oral. Why would I go to a signing school? I don't know how to sign."

"Well, you're better off going to that university because you'll never make it on your own, here, at a hearing university."

That was a huge insult. I completely lost it. I thought to myself, "EXCUSE ME. I worked so hard all the way through elementary school, high school, and you say I can't make it through university here? What are you talking about? You have no right to say that." I was so angry. "GET LOST!"

I went home and told my mom what happened, "She wants me to go to Gallaudet University because she thinks that I can't make it here at a hearing university. I'm going to prove to her that I can do it... I don't want her to be my teacher anymore!"

So I met with my guidance counsellor. She said, "You know, you're making a mistake here. There's only six months left until you graduate. It's tough."

"No. I don't want her. I've had enough. I can't continue with her."

"Well, you have to continue with her unless your mom writes you a note saying that she gives you permission to discontinue seeing her."

"Oh, no problem."

So I went home. "Mom, the counsellor told me that I have to continue with Ms. Jones unless you write me a note."

My mom said, "No problem." And wrote the note. I was so happy that my mom supported me. I couldn't stand Ms. Jones. My guidance counsellor took the necessary steps. I no longer had to see Ms. Jones.

High school was tough. Part of that is related to being deaf and being oral; but, I made it. I did make it through the classes without any interpreter.

A final incident happened that stands out in my mind. Prior to graduation, my counsellor approached my mom and asked her if it was OK to give me a special gift to congratulate me on making it through. My mom said sure. Most of my fellow students didn't know that I was deaf but at our graduation ceremony they all found out. It was a two-hour ceremony and I was so bored. I couldn't really follow what was going on in the ceremony. Finally, nearing the end of the ceremony, a teacher proceeded to the front with a special gift. She started speaking about a girl who "made it through, persevered through high school and made it through, was really assertive..." Then she added, "She's not able to hear what I'm saying."

The person who was sitting beside me, who knew I was deaf, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "It's you. It's you. It's you."

And I was like stunned, "What? What are you talking about?"

"She's talking about you."

"No." I quickly looked up on stage and I didn't even know what had been said. When I looked up she said, "And her name is Deborah." I caught my name. I was really confused. I stood and made my way to the stage. She congratulated me and handed me a heavy book wrapped in wrapping paper. I looked out and everyone was standing and cheering for me.

Afterwards, people approached me, "I didn't know you were deaf."

I realized that they had announced that I was deaf. Inside I felt like, "Come on. Why'd you go and do that for? Such a big mouth."

And people would say, "You're really deaf?"

"Yeah, I'm deaf."

"Well you never told me."

I kept saying, "Well, you never asked."

After the ceremony I took off and partied with my classmates all night. And then after that I kind of lost contact with them…

Chapter 6 – "I am Deaf!"

After high school, I continued working at a restaurant job that I had started when I was in high school. This was the time in my life when things really started to change. Shortly after graduation, I started meeting some of my former oral deaf classmates. Many of them now used sign language and knew people in the Deaf community. And this is how it started… This was my introduction to the Deaf world.

One of the first Deaf events I went to was a Christmas party where there were over 50 young Deafies. I was curious, "What was it like to be with people who are Deaf?" The party was a real eye-opener for me. I realized, "Here I am with all these Deaf people who sign fluently and they don't have any difficulties with communication." The communication between them was fluid - incredible. I wanted to know what they were saying. When I asked, my friends would tell me what people were saying. I was sure curious.

I also remember the first corn party I ever went to. There were 300 people there. I was shocked. "Where have you been? Where do you live?" It was amazing to see so many Deaf people in the same place.

So, I became really curious about sign language and I wanted to be more involved in the Deaf community. I started spending more time with Deaf friends who helped me learn sign language but it was hard for me because my language foundation was English. It was difficult to make the transition to ASL.

Shortly after that initial party was a Valentine's party. A Deaf guy, Paul, who I met at the Christmas party, had been asking my friends about me and was checking to see if I would be going to this next party. I did go. Paul and I spent time together at the party and later into

the night he asked me for my phone number. I was cautious about it, but did give it to him. Shortly after that, we went on our first date and began dating.

This social change really had an impact on my family life. As I mentioned before my family life at home was not good. My father's drinking had been getting worse and I was more aware of how he was treating my mom. As I got older, I began to pay attention to what my dad was saying to my mom. He said very abusive things to my mom, "Your bloody stupid children." "Stupid kids."

Then one day I witnessed an incident. He was drunk, angry about something, "You and your bloody children... You and your stupid kids... One day I'm going to ..."

I spoke up and said, "Dad, I'm YOUR bloody child, too."

I was getting more and more rebellious. My rebelliousness started in high school, but following graduation, when I began exploring who I was as a Deaf person, things really escalated.

Both my parents were really disappointed and against me being involved in the Deaf community. So there were many conflicts, but I was determined to do what I wanted. Sign language was a controversial issue. When I started learning sign, my dad said, "What's that for? What good is that? We spent all this money on speech training. Why are you signing?" But I wanted to show him, "Look. I'm Deaf." My dad refused to accept my deafness

Then when I started dating Paul, my parents, my dad especially, lost it. He was furious, but my attitude was, "I don't care. I like him."

One night my mom allowed me to ask Paul for dinner. My father was so mean. We were getting ready to eat, being seated at the dinner table. My father refused to sit with us. He waited in the living room until we finished eating. Then, he went to the kitchen and ate alone. He refused to be in the same room as Paul.

My mom made efforts. She told me, "The next time your dad goes away for a hunting or fishing trip on the weekend, you can invite Paul over to the house – when he's not here."

Initially communication between Paul and I was a struggle. Fortunately, Paul was skilled at gesture and he would dramatize things when I didn't understand the sign. He was great at acting out concepts and he really helped me learn sign. In fact, when I would meet a new Deaf person they'd often say, "Oh, you sure sign like Paul." I guess he was such a strong influence on me because he was the primary person I learned sign language from.

I was very excited about sign language. I would come home and show my mom signs. This would make my father so angry. "We worked hard raising you orally."

And I'd reply, "Dad, you don't accept that I'm deaf? I've been deaf all my life. I'm just learning a different language."

My father and I fought constantly. We fought about sign language, about Paul, and about my signing Deaf friends. He didn't like me being out with Deaf people. I started staying out late because I didn't want to come home. I preferred being out with my friends. I was enjoying myself. I was meeting more Deaf people and I was learning sign language. I began to immerse myself in the Deaf community. I participated in sports. In high school I didn't have those opportunities. I didn't have the time. I had to go home and study; and, I didn't join because of communication. So now, I participated in every opportunity: bowling, badminton, volleyball, baseball… I got on the board of a local Deaf organization. I began to uncover skills and qualities that I hadn't known about myself. I hadn't had the opportunities to discover them previously.

Some aspects of entering the Deaf community were tough, especially communication. Another issue, however, that came up was politics in the Deaf community. It was hard to be accepted. I had been raised orally. That was an issue. Also, Deaf girls in the community excluded me. The guys were attracted to me because I was a new face. The girls were jealous, so they excluded me. They gossiped about me and stabbed me in the back. At that time, however, I was realizing that I had missed out on things when I was growing up and I wanted to grab every opportunity and absorb the experiences I had missed. So I ignored the politics and hung out with the people who accepted me.

One issue that I didn't realize was that I was being oppressive. I think this contributed to the hard feelings. At that time I felt like I wanted to help them. But they didn't want my help. It was oppressive. But at that stage, I was still trying to figure out who I was and I hadn't really looked at my behaviour. Some in the Deaf community would use that derogatory sign THINK-HEARING when talking about me. So those first years were a struggle. I really wanted to be included and I really had to fight to be accepted in the Deaf community.

While I was busy working at being accepted in the Deaf community things at home were coming to a head. In fact, my mom and I had a huge fight. I can't remember exactly what caused the fight, but for two weeks we didn't speak.

Finally, I decided to do something. I sat down and wrote a letter for my mom. I explained what I was feeling and what I was going through. I wanted to tell my mom that I loved her, but also, that I am Deaf. I explained about my life and that I now realized who I was. I told her that I felt like I had lost her as my support. She was – is – such an important person in my life.

I basically bared my soul. I wrote down what I was feeling and I gave the letter to her. That day I told her, "Mom, there's a note for you in your bedroom."

She went and read the letter in her bedroom. After reading it, she came to me in tears. She gave me a big hug and then we had a heart-to-heart conversation. I was able to tell her how I felt about my father and her relationship with him. I told her that I hated him and that I didn't understand why she stayed in the relationship. She was able to share with me that she wanted to leave but that she had been waiting until my brother and I were older.

I told her that I had been going through a time of figuring out who I was, realizing that I was Deaf. "That's me. My identity is in the Deaf community." I told her, "I grew up oral for you. Now it's my turn. Sign is easy. Oral communication is frustrating and I'm learning Sign." I explained, "It's a language and it's the language of who I am. I am Deaf. Period. That's it. I can't do anything about that part of who I am. I am Deaf. I have a new language, a new life. Well, not a new life, but a new language." I explained, "Mom, you're Italian. That's your identity. Well, I'm Deaf. That's me." And from then on she really changed. She realized how important Deaf culture was. Deaf was my identity.   So the years following high school were full of exploration and discovery of the Deaf world.

Another aspect of my post-high school years involved a post-secondary program in the Lower Mainland. When I got the Gallaudet entrance exam back, I ended up throwing the acceptance letter out. I was set on going to a hearing university here. I wanted to prove to Ms. Jones that I could do it. I completed an accounting and computer program that was funded by the Vancouver Rehabilitation Services [VRS]. It wasn't university level, but it was a big deal for me. I felt like, "See, Ms. Jones, I can do it." Now I felt ready to go to Gallaudet. Unfortunately, obstacles got in the way.

I went back to VRS and told them that I wanted to go to Gallaudet. They said, "You're doing fine here in college. You can go to College or University here."

"What? Hey, I've now learned about the Deaf community and Deaf culture, and I want to go to Gallaudet. That's my identity. I'm a Deaf person and I want to go to Gallaudet. I'll feel comfortable there."

But VRS turned me down because they had already paid for me to go to college here in Vancouver. Naturally, I was upset and angry, and I didn't realize that I could fight for it. So I accepted their decision and decided to find a job.

I went to an organization that helps individuals with disabilities find work. They looked around and found me a job at McDonald's. Initially, I wasn't interested. I didn't understand that it was a job working in the head office. After they explained what the job was, I decided to apply. They hired me and I've been working there ever since.

One key event that happened during these years was that my mom left my dad. I was ecstatic but my brother wasn't happy. He didn't want my mom and dad to separate.

Things between my parents had continuously gotten worse. Just before my mom decided to leave, they had a huge fight. One night after my mom had worked hard to cook dinner, my dad said, "I don't want that." I remember him picking up the table and things falling on the floor. My mom refused to clean it up and planned to leave it until my father cleaned it. But my dad invited friends over; and my mom, not wanting to be embarrassed by the mess on the floor, resigned herself to the fact that he was not going to clean up his mess. She cleaned it up herself. Finally, my mom decided, "It's time for us to leave - move out." And we did. Peace at last!

Chapter Seven – "Enjoying Life"

A year after my mom left my dad, I decided to move out. I had my job at McDonald's, a new car, and I felt like it was time for me to be independent. I found some roommates and moved out on my own for the first time.

I continued to be more active in the Deaf community. I got more involved with the Deaf women's baseball team. I experienced my first true love and heartbreak. I did a ton of camping. I was involved in the 4 X 4 group. I joined bowling and volleyball. Single life was wonderful. I enjoyed it so much. This is when I really lost contact with my hearing friends. I was immersed in the Deaf world, with all my Deaf friends. There was communication there.

That was a key issue for me. I could have meaningful conversations. This was my life. It was an open door for me – the Deaf community.

During this time the Deaf women's baseball team was a big part of my life. In addition to games and practices, much of my social life was spending time with the women from the team and guys from the Deaf men's team. In 1995, we were the champions. Both the men's – the Totems – and the women's – the Wolves – won the final tournament.

Unfortunately, while I was away at the tournament my grandfather's health deteriorated and he ended up in the hospital. I returned, and was able to visit him in the hospital. He died a few days later. Shortly after the funeral, my family asked if I would move into the basement suite of my grandma's house.

"Me? Move here?" I was concerned about my privacy and independence. I liked living on my own. I liked that I could stay out late and no one would be there, worrying about me and lecturing me. I could do what I wanted to. But family is important. My grandma was alone and she had never been alone her whole life. So I agreed.

I told my roommates, "I have to move. My family's first." I've been living in the basement suite ever since.

So during these years – 23 to 28 – I truly was enjoying life. I dated a lot. I had an active social life. And I had a good job.

Chapter 8 – "Family Life"

I first saw my husband in 1992 at the Canadian Deaf Festival held here in Richmond, B.C. We never really spoke because he thought I was a hearing person – I wasn't a fluent signer. I saw him again at the Canadian Deaf Slo-Pitch Tournament in 1994; then again, in 1995. Then, in 1996 at the Slo-Pitch Tournament in Edmonton, Dan and I met. Two weeks later, I saw him again. He was in Vancouver and I met him at the Pub. I couldn't believe it. There was Dan. I walked over to him and asked, "What the hell are you doing here? I'm seeing all these Alberta people coming here to B.C."

He joked, "I came to see you." Then he explained, "I'm here to help set up a company in Vancouver. My company in Edmonton wants to open up one here. So I'm going to be here for 4 weeks to help them."

I had lots of free time and so I volunteered to show him around Vancouver. We spent every night together and started becoming romantically involved, but I made it clear that I

wasn't interested in a long-distance relationship. He decided to approach his boss and see if it was possible to stay in Vancouver at the new location. His boss approved; and so Dan moved here. That's when our relationship became more serious, and in one year, we were married.

One of the reasons we got engaged so quickly was because of my family. I was living in my grandma's basement suite and she was adamant, "He can't stay overnight." My grandma was an Italian Catholic. So Dan and I would have to be sneaky about him spending the night. Dan would park his car around the corner and then walk back to spend the night. After a few months dating, we had a discussion and decided to get engaged. We thought that getting engaged would help my family accept him moving in with me. So, we started dating, got engaged, and got married in one year. One year after our wedding, I was pregnant. Our oldest daughter was born in 1998.

When we first got engaged, my grandma asked worriedly, "Are you going to move out?"

"No grandma, we're going to stay. Don't worry." She was so relieved.

Then when we were expecting Melissa, she asked again, "Are you going to move out?"

"No, no, we're going to stay."

When my family found out that I was pregnant, they were worried. They didn't know how I was going to manage, being deaf. "You're deaf. How will you do this?"

"I can do it fine."

I explained to my family about the technology that's available: the flashing lights that alert you when the baby is crying. So I set it up and gave them a demonstration. They saw that when the phone rang the light flashed. They still had concerns.

"How will you tell the difference between the phone ringing and the baby crying?"

"Look at the rhythm of the light flashing: see the phone is an extended kind of ring and the baby crying is a constant flashing."

I had to teach them and educate them. I was trying to help them not to worry. My grandma still worried, though. When she heard Melissa cry, she'd come down to make sure I knew that the baby was crying. I'd say, "Yes, the lights working, Grandma." The baby was born and everything was fine.

Again, one issue that's been at the forefront in our family has been communication. My grandma and aunts were concerned about how we'd communicate with our children. "How are you going to communicate with your child?"

"It's going to be fine. I'm going to sign."

Then they were shocked to witness Melissa signing before the age of one. She was signing dad, mom, milk, and food. When they witnessed Melissa signing so early, it really impacted them. They realized that I could raise and care for my baby. The irony is that they learned some sign language from my children.

Celia, our second daughter, doesn't sign like Melissa. I think she depends on her older sister to communicate for her. I try to get her to sign. Sometimes, when she speaks to me, I will tell her that I can't understand and explain that she needs to sign. She gets frustrated and then Melissa will jump in to tell me what she's saying. I'll tell her, "No, no. I don't want you to interpret. Celia and I can communicate directly."

I emphasize to Dan that it's really important for us to sign with the kids. He often speaks with them. But I encourage him, "It's important not to use your voice and sign. We're going to be frustrated later if they don't know how to communicate back to us. If we don't do it now, how are we going to communicate later?" Communication is so important. It is such a key issue.

Another big issue in our lives is my husband's health. He's been off work for six months. He has an illness that he has been struggling with for the last three years. So he's been at home looking after the girls.

So, at least at this stage in my life, I honestly have to say that family life hasn't been a fun life. The last six years have flown by. I got married. I was pregnant. Melissa was born, and then Celia. So I have had, and have, lots of responsibilities. I feel really tied down. Family life has been a lot of work. I haven't had time for the things that I used to really enjoy, like my social life and all the sports I used to be involved with. Once in a while I've managed to find time to get involved in volunteering and fundraising events in the Deaf community, but I realize that at this stage in my life, family life is my priority.

Part II

Readings Across the Stories – My Stories

The heading of this section includes the words "My Stories." I have chosen to use these words to emphasize the epistemological paradigm within which this research, and more specifically, this discussion, takes place. This research is positioned within a postmodern paradigm that advances the view that knowledge and truth are multiple, contextual, political, and based on values and beliefs (Haegert, 1999). As Haegert stated,

> Unlike the realist view, there are "no firm and steady truths about the world" and "no accurate representations of the world can be produced" (Denzin, 1997, p. 265). Each person constructs his or her own version of the truth. Essentially, 'truth is always personal and subjective' (Denzin, p. 266)." (p. 57)

Therefore, the following discussion is a representation of *my* interpretations, that is, *my* readings across the life stories that Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah shared with me. My readings across the stories were guided by the research question of the present study, that is, how do Deaf[27] women perceive the influence of hearing loss as they construct their identities in the narratives they tell? Thus, the present discussion is limited to this analysis and focuses on the intersection of hearing loss and identity from a narrative lens. First, I describe how the application of a narrative lens in the analysis of the stories reveals insights into theorizing about narrative identities. Second, I discuss how the three women represented the influence of hearing loss on identity construction, specifically exploring how discourses of normalcy, discourses of difference, discourses of passing and Deaf cultural discourses were invoked as the women constructed their identities. However, before proceeding with the presentation of my story, I include some reflections on some of the struggles I faced while engaging the task of writing my story.

Self-Reflections

During the process of writing my interpretations, I became intensely aware of the ethical and political nature of writing about my participants. Haegert (1999) cautioned of the possible harm to participants when the research is written up. This is especially true in

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[27] Regardless of differing degrees of hearing loss, as adults, the participants invoked the political identity marker of Deaf, that is an identity as culturally Deaf. This is illustrated in the narrative summaries in chapter 5 of this present study. In an effort to respect and honour their self-identification I will use Deaf to refer to the participants in this study.

narrative research, such as mine, where participants have disclosed details of their life stories, rendering them "more vulnerable to exposure than [by] conventional qualitative studies" (Chase, 1995, p. 46). I had committed myself to collaboration with Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah in representing their life stories as narrative summaries, however, now, as I struggled to present my story, my interpretations of their life stories, I began to resonate with the words of Josselson (1996):

> My guilt, I think, comes from my knowing that I have taken myself out of relationship with my participants (with whom, during the interview, I was in intimate relationship) to be in relationship with my readers. I have, in a sense, been talking about them behind their backs and doing so publicly. Where in the interview I had been responsive to them, now I am using their lives in the service of something else, for my own purposes, to show something to others. I am guilty about being an intruder and then, to some extent, a betrayer (p. 70).

Furthermore, I became acutely aware of my situatedness as a hearing researcher writing about three women who identify themselves politically and culturally as Deaf. Although I did collaborate closely with the Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah in the analysis that led to the creation of their narrative summaries, I did not collaborate with my participants in the writing of my interpretations. I recognize a tension exists by situating myself as a feminist who has adopted collaborative research methods, and yet, who has failed to exercise collaboration throughout the entire research process. My decision was guided by pragmatics, specifically the issue of feasibility and time. A consequence of this decision is that feminist concerns with authority, representation, and voice are intensified. This is a limitation of my study and in Chapter Seven I outline some implications for future research, as well, as suggestions for future researchers utilizing this method. However, in light of the subsequent discussion being limited to my readings across the stories, I want to emphasize that I am writing in my voice. It is *my* story. The degree to which Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah may agree or disagree with some, parts, and/or all of my interpretations is unknown. All three women, however, were aware that this would be part of my research and I have tried to honour their voices as I've engaged this process of writing about them.

Applying a Narrative Lens

The present study, situated within a social constructionist view of narrative identities, rejects the notion of an inner core self and proposes that self is multiple and multilayered. Selves and identities are in process; drawing on the pre-existing discourses around us, we construct our identities in the narratives we tell. These identities may intersect, compete, and exist in tension with one another. When exploring Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's life stories, examples of identity performances congruent with narrative theorizing manifest themselves.

As with narrative theorizing, all three women performed identities that were multilayered, with multiple and at times, competing plot lines (Mishler, 1999). As narrators of their own stories, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah positioned themselves in a multiplicity of ways when sharing their life stories. Each woman presented herself in diverse, and at times, contradictory ways. For example, some of the ways Kailyn positioned self were as gifted, successful, a victim, a resister, isolated, culturally Deaf, profoundly deaf, an oral success, silenced, and between worlds. Similarly, Maria and Deborah positioned selves in a multiplicity of ways. Maria positioned herself as an advocate, hard of hearing, an outsider, a survivor, culturally Deaf, Italian, a teacher, hidden, a leader, an oral success, outgoing, and oppressed. Deborah positioned herself as an oral success, culturally Deaf, determined, a rebel, accepting, an outsider, a leader, hard working, Italian, and a loyal family member. The above-mentioned lists are not exhaustive, but rather, they are intended to demonstrate the multilayered and textured ways the women presented self in their narratives.

At times during the analysis, I wrestled with competing presentations of self. I was inclined to try and resolve the contradictions; however, upon further reflection I realized that, in fact, the seemingly contradictory presentations of self were congruent with a narrative position of selves and identities. A narrative method rooted in social constructionism allowed for the exploration of emerging contradictions as they became apparent throughout the research process. One example involved my analysis of Kailyn's research interview. As I repeatedly reviewed her narrative, I experienced her positioning herself in seemingly incongruous ways when discussing her oral background. She presented a pride in her oral success, a gratefulness and loyalty to her parents' choices to raise her orally, but also a regret that she wasn't raised with sign language and a longing to have experienced Deaf culture

from her childhood through University. During the research interview Kailyn expressed increasing struggles she was having with her family since coming to identify herself as culturally Deaf. In response to my probe asking her, "What is the struggle?" She replied,

> Well, the communication, and ASL. It's about why they didn't use ASL with me when I was growing up. Um, I'm happy that I was raised orally because I can go between both worlds. So maybe I have the best of both worlds (Kailyn, lines 1507 – 1523). . . . If I hadn't developed oral skills, then I wouldn't fit in the hearing world. But sometimes I wish, darn, I wish I had gone to a deaf school. I wish I had learned ASL a long time ago (lines 1643-1647).

Adopting a narrative view of identities encourages a perspective that holds competing selves and plot lines in tension (Mishler, 1999). Rather than having to resolve the tensions and seeming contradictions – Kailyn either embraces her oral history or confronts it with regret – a narrative positioning advances the possibility of assuming multiple and contradictory positions. For example, rather than *x or y or z*, one can assume all three: *x and y and z.*

A second finding congruent with a narrative view of identity is that all three participants demonstrated in their narratives how they navigated and continue to navigate identities within the contexts where they live their lives. A premise of narrative identity is that we construct our multiple identities/selves relationally, drawing on the preexisting discourses available to us in our cultures, and that this process is an ongoing negotiation within and between the contexts where we live.

As the research interviews were conducted with a guide aimed to elicit each participant's life story, the narratives unfolded in a sequential way. Thus, various contexts held differing prominence in the life stories given the participants' ages of life. Similar to previous studies investigating deafness and identity (e.g., Glickman, 1993; 1996; Leigh, 1999; Leigh et al., 1998; Overstreet, 1999; Rose, 2001), family contexts, education experiences, and exposure to the Deaf community were influential in the ongoing process of identity construction.

Throughout the life stories, the family continued to be a significant context within which the participants negotiated identity. In the early years, it was the family context that held prominence in the participants' stories. Not surprisingly, educational placements were introduced to the stories when the participants entered school programs, adding a new arena

for navigating identity. As all three women grew up in hearing-oriented environments, the Deaf community did not emerge as an influential context for identity construction until later in the participants' stories, after they had graduated from high school and began initiating increased contact with Deaf people.

An additional feature of identity construction that manifested itself through the process of analysis – both reading for the research question and reading for relations of power – was the way in which particular discourses shaped, defined, and/or limited the possible ways of constituting self in the participants' life stories. Pre-existing discourses that permeated the cultural and institutional practices where the three women lived their lives (e.g., discourses of normalcy present in the participants' educational contexts) influenced how each participant went about making meaning of living with a hearing loss and how she constructed her identities. For example, in Kailyn's life story, Kailyn did not construct herself as different/disabled, prior to entering elementary school. It was not until after entering the hearing elementary school, where discourses of normalcy and difference were salient, that she began to construct herself as different, that is, as not hearing. The following quote illustrates:

> You know, in preschool we were pretty isolated with other kids who had disabilities. And I remember, here we were at this clinic and there were these other disabled kids and I really didn't identify myself as disabled. It was like, "No, I'm not like them. I can talk. I socialize with people fine. I can lipread." And then when I went to elementary school I noticed that I was more different, um, that in fact there was something different about me. Because here I was now in this hearing world and there were all these hearing people and I was different from them (Kailyn, lines 221 – 231).

Her introduction to a new context within which to navigate identity influenced how she made meaning of hearing loss, which influenced her constructions of identity.

The following section describes some of the ways that the women went about employing four pre-existing discourses as they constructed their identities. The four discourses discussed in this section are: discourses of normalcy, discourses of difference, discourses of passing, and discourses of Deaf culture. I begin with an overview describing the above-mentioned discourses followed by a critical examination of how these discourses contradicted, overlapped, coexisted and competed in the three women's life stories.

Discourses at work in the narratives

Discourses of normalcy and body ideals

When reviewing the three participants' narratives, the prominence of discourses of normalcy – drawing on notions of a body ideal and a human norm – was unmistakable. In our society, discourses of a prevailing body ideal exist – the able-bodied, strong, beautiful, healthy, pain-free and productive body (Wendell, 1996). It is a body that does not deviate from the standard, regular healthy body – the norm – as constructed by biomedicine (Davis, 1995). These discourses – the meanings, representations, images, stories, and statements which construct a particular understanding of the ideal body (Burr, 1995) – permeate the structures and language practices in our society. Thus, although human bodies exist in remarkably diverse ways, certain bodies are scrutinized and labeled as abnormal or different.

An overview of Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's life stories reveals the significance of discourses of normalcy in these narratives. In fact, discourses of normalcy were an overriding presence operating in both explicit and implicit (unnamed) ways. One explicit way that discourses of normalcy manifested themselves in the participants' family contexts, medical practices, and educational contexts was in the commitment to an auditory/oral philosophy with the goal of full integration in the hearing world where deafness is minimized and overcome through speaking and listening. The goal becomes replicating the 'normal' hearing person as closely as possible (Grushkin, 1997). In fact, all three women performed an oral deaf identity in their life stories.

performing an oral deaf identity.

In the early years, all three participants performed an oral deaf identity. They attended oral deaf programs that adopted auditory/oral education approaches. These settings embraced the goals that deaf and hard of hearing children should endeavour to develop clear speech, utilize whatever residual hearing is available, and perfect lipreading skills. These institutional practices influenced how each woman made meaning of living with a hearing loss. In fact, all three women embraced that this was the way to be deaf and integrated these discourses in how they constructed self.

All three women presented self as oral successes, highlighting their abilities to communicate like hearing people using spoken English and their successes in mainstream settings. Maria explicitly stated, "I was what they called an oral success" (Maria, line 50).

Deborah repeatedly spoke of her abilities to speak like a hearing person and her exceptional lipreading skills. She shared, "My speech was perfect. I guess by grade 5 and up, people, they didn't know I was deaf. My voice sounded like hearing people, and my lipreading was perfect" (Deborah, line 960-967). Kailyn highlighted her ability to excel academically in a fully integrated hearing class, "on par with the hearing students" (lines 244-245). In fact, despite other oral deaf students who transferred to signing programs, all three participants spoke of remaining in oral programs for their elementary school years. Maria and Deborah continued with oral only communication through high school. Kailyn's experience differed; sign language was introduced at the end of elementary school. Initially, sign language was used only socially with the signing deaf students at Kailyn's high school. Kailyn continued using oral only communication in the classroom; however, in grade 12, Kailyn transferred to a different high school in her local neighbourhood. In this new high school, Kailyn had a sign language interpreter who used American Sign Language.

Another example of the authority of discourses of normalcy, which compelled an oral deaf identity in the family and educational contexts, was demonstrated in the participants' stories of keeping their knowledge of sign language a secret from both parents and teachers. Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah shared the common experience of early knowledge of and curiousity in sign language. However, they also shared the awareness that it was important to keep this knowledge of sign language hidden from both teachers and parents. Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah knew that sign language was forbidden and feared that they would get in trouble if their knowledge of sign was discovered. These stories may be interpreted as resisting the oral deaf discourses associated with discourses of normalcy; but they also illustrate the three participants' consciousness of oral deaf discourses and how these were at work in both their family and educational settings. A quote from Deborah illustrates,

> I already knew how to fingerspell the ABCs [before kindergarten]. But I never showed my parents. That was when I was between the ages of 3 and 5. It was forbidden in school. My mom would take me and drive to a place where I would get on a school bus and I remember on that school bus there were other deaf children who used sign. I remember being really curious about sign language and so I learned my ABCs. But, I wasn't allowed to use it in school, and um, I didn't want my parents to know for sure. I was afraid I'd get in trouble. You know, it was a real serious policy:

gesture and sign were forbidden. But I knew my ABCs all through my schooling and growing up (Deborah, lines 345 – 357).

Similarly, Kailyn spoke of her early knowledge of sign and her awareness that this way of communicating was not acceptable in her family or educational contexts:

Really, I just remember [Sign] being something you had to hide. It was a secret. You weren't allowed. You couldn't tell the teachers. You couldn't tell your parents. It was all a secret. It was hidden. It was something that we had to hide (Kailyn, lines 326 – 329).

These oral deaf discourses, underpinned by discourses of normalcy, were poignant influences. In fact, as adults who embrace American Sign Language as their preferred method of communication,[28] all three participants continued to use oral communication with their families of origin at the time of this research. This is noteworthy, considering that all three participants use Sign as a metaphor and a way of performing their Deaf identities. Apparently, all three women negotiated their identities within a family context where discourses of normalcy, as exemplified by a commitment to an auditory/oral approach, were at work. Despite their adult transition to a Deaf cultural identity embracing American Sign Language, it is important to note that all three participants communicated a high regard for the support and effort that their mothers invested in their auditory/oral training.

The previous discussion has centred on an explicit manifestation of discourses of normalcy in the participants' performances as oral deaf individuals in both family and school contexts. However, discourses of normalcy existed in many implicit and unnamed ways. In fact, the very existence of discourses of normalcy presumes an "other" – its opposite: difference (Davis, 1995; 1997). Thus, discourses of normalcy operated in a binary relationship juxtaposed to discourses of difference. Through this binary relationship, discourses of normalcy imbued discourses of difference with meaning. The next section discusses discourses of difference.

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[28] The term "preferred method of communication" describes all three participants' preference to use American Sign Language as adults. All three women, however, may use a variety of methods to communicate in practice depending on a particular context. The decision of which method of communication to use is often influenced by the communication abilities of the people with whom they are interacting or the availability of a sign language interpreter.

Discourses of difference.

Discourses of difference were manifest throughout the narratives of the three participants in how they made meaning of living with a hearing loss. One way that discourses of difference were invoked was analogous to the findings of Israelite et al. (2002) and Leigh (1999) who, drawing on the theorizing of Woodward (1997), found that oral deaf and hard of hearing students constructed identity through perceptions of difference and in terms of oppositions. Interestingly, there were many textures and layers to how the concept of difference was invoked by participants in the present study. Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah constructed themselves as different from children with disabilities. Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah constructed themselves as different from the hearing individuals in their social worlds. In the school years, prior to their introduction to the Deaf community, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah constructed themselves as different from signing deaf and hard of hearing students. Interestingly, the emotional meanings that the women ascribed to the experience of difference varied over time and in different contexts. For example, Deborah's narrative indicated that she constructed herself as different; however, as her life story depicts, in spite of the difference, she strongly identified with her hearing friends, peers, and neighbours. It was not until she was introduced to Deaf cultural discourses that she began to re-story her earlier interactions with hearing people. This example highlights the complexities of how discourses of difference were at work in the participants' narratives. An additional permutation and layer to discourses of difference emerged in the narratives, after the participants' exposure to Deaf cultural discourses. As Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah began to construct their identities as culturally Deaf, the women began to construct themselves as different from hard of hearing and oral deaf individuals. Finally, the women shared stories where some members of the Deaf community constructed each of them (meaning Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah) as small 'd' deaf. In these examples, difference was constructed in terms of opposites (Israelite et al.). Binary pairs of normal/disabled, hearing/deaf or hard of hearing, oral/signer, and Deaf/deaf or hard of hearing were at present in the life stories Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah shared.

Israelite et al. (2002) stated that the effect of constructing identities marked by difference leads to categorizations of "insiders and outsiders, [or put another way], 'us' and 'them'" (p. 135). Examining the narratives with a critical lens directed at uncovering

relations of power, I perceived a relationship in the partnerships where one side of the binary was privileged and the opposite was "othered"[29] (Wendell, 1996, p. 60). In examining the identity discourses in Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's life stories, I observed that in the identity stories drawing on discourses of difference, the women constructed themselves as insiders or outsiders, and at times, as both. For example, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah all told stories of being different than children with intellectual and physical disabilities, constructing themselves as 'insiders,' while at the same time, they also constructed themselves as 'not hearing,' that is, 'outsiders'. Examples such as these demonstrate the complex ways identities can coexist, contradict, overlap and compete.

Reflecting on the processes in which the women positioned themselves as insiders and outsiders, I began to detect that, again, discourses of normalcy were at work in the participants' stories, operating in implicit ways, juxtaposed to discourses of difference. Difference was established based on overriding societal standards of normality. Thus, one side of the binary was constructed as normal, or at least replicating these standards, while its opposite was constructed as abnormal and different. For example, used in this way, being deaf and hard of hearing meant being different from the 'normal' hearing majority, e.g., their family members, peers in their classes, and friends in their neighbourhood, while being deaf and hard of hearing, not hearing, was ascribed negative value. This usage of difference is similar to the concept of stigma – an undesired differentness – as described by Goffman (in Coleman, 1997). This meaning permeated the family and educational contexts where Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah negotiated their identities.

family context.

The family context was a crucial, early and enduring context within which the three participants negotiated their identities. All three women described families where they received love, support and nurturing. In fact, all three women praised their mothers for their devotion and dedication to the girls during their early developmental years. Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah told of their gratefulness and appreciation to their mothers for the mothers' hard work and commitment to auditory/oral communication. However, discourses of normalcy

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[29] "Othering" is a feminist construct that brings together the notion of difference with an analysis of relations of power (Wendell, 1996, p. 60). Feminists uncover the unequal relationship between the partners, demonstrating how one of the pair is privileged while the opposite is othered. Critical feminist theories are interested in uncoupling these binary partners and exposing how the binary partnership limits possible ways of being.

were present, alongside the stories of gratitude and maternal love, in the emphasis to perform an auditory/oral deaf identity. Discourses of normalcy worked in partnership with discourses of difference, constructing hearing loss as an abnormality, the effects of which should be minimized.

Discourses of difference were visible in the family context in the participants' stories of diagnosis. For all three, the stories of diagnosis entailed a medical process through which an abnormality was confirmed and hearing loss was constructed as negative and shocking. A quote from Deborah illustrates:

> Well, memories? I don't have any memories from that time of my life. My mom had to fill me in on the important things that happened. It's my understanding that when I was born my parents didn't know I was deaf. They didn't realize it at all. But when I was 4 ½ months old, my grandfather had a suspicion that I couldn't hear... [at about one year of age] my grandma approached my mom and said, "you know your daughter has a hearing *problem*." My mom was in *denial*. She didn't accept it... finally she took me to a specialist, an ear, nose and throat specialist because she knew or had a gut feeling that *something was wrong*. And finally I had a hearing test and that doctor told my mom straight up, "Your daughter is deaf" (Deborah, lines 54 – 90, italics added for emphasis).

educational contexts.

Educational settings emerged as another prominent context in the participants' life stories where discourses of difference were at work, influencing how the participants went about the task of constructing their identities. Within their educational placements, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah were exposed to discourses of difference where hearing loss was construed as an abnormality. In the following identity discourses, it can be seen how Maria invoked an understanding of hearing loss as a negative difference:

> It's like I was really aware that I was different from the other kids in high school. I mean I had hearing aids. No one else in the school had hearing aids. Why did I talk funny? Why did I talk differently from the other kids? (Maria, lines 234 – 238)

Further into the narrative, Maria adds:

> I felt different. I felt like why did God punish me? I had to wear hearing aids. I couldn't figure out why I couldn't hear. "Why am I different from everyone else?

Why am I alone? The only one?" I grew up, um, I didn't understand myself (Maria, lines 498 – 492).

These quotes demonstrate that discourses of difference influenced how Maria constructed self and reveal the relational quality of identity construction. Maria constructed her identity based on her position as different from her hearing peers, and this difference was infused with a negative value.

The workings of discourses of difference in the educational settings can also be seen in the participants' descriptions of being drawn to other oral deaf students in their schools. Previous research (e.g., Israelite et al., 2002; Stinson et al., 1996) has demonstrated that mainstreamed deaf and hard of hearing students benefit from a critical mass of same status peers in their educational placements. Similarly, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah expressed their preference to socialize with the other deaf and hard of hearing peers in their school settings. Applying a narrative lens to this finding, however, contributes an added dimension. A narrative focus shifts the inquiry to ways the normalcy/difference binary influenced this longing to socialize with oral deaf and hard of hearing peers.

Discourses of normalcy and difference, which constructed hearing loss as different and abnormal, created a distance from the hearing students and promoted a longing for sameness. Stories shared by all three women illustrate this. For example, after sharing her perceptions of how she was different from her hearing peers, Maria shared, "Growing up I wanted to be the same. I wanted to be the same as hearing people" (Maria, lines 675 – 676). In fact, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah all sought out others who were the same – oral deaf schoolmates. Kailyn stated:

> The hearing kids would tease me and make fun of when I'd try to fit in with them. I would talk and they would tease me... that "you're different." They'd make fun of how we talked, our gesturing and how we'd try to communicate with each other. And that's why between the ages of 5 to 12, this deaf group, we stuck together. We didn't really socialize much with the hearing kids because it was safer to be together (Kailyn, lines 323 – 239).

In addition, Deborah explained how she was drawn to the other deaf and hard of hearing children in her school because of a "connection" (Deborah, lines 738 – 741).

The normalcy/difference binary exhibited its influence in the cultural and institutional practices of the school setting throughout the participants' educational experiences. For example, Maria shared how each year she would try to sit near the back in an inconspicuous seat; however, every fall the teacher would single her out and move her to the front so that she was in a better position to lipread (Maria lines 170 – 177). This practice, while making good sense given Maria's communication needs, was an action that served to emphasize her difference, which she internalized.

Another example of the normalcy/difference binary at work in the institutional practices was in barriers the three women faced in their education settings. For example, one barrier identified by the participants was the false lowered expectations of some of the educators toward the girls because they were deaf. Both Deborah and Kailyn shared that they were denied the opportunity to take French in school because the educators believed that deaf students couldn't succeed in learning French. Both Deborah and Kailyn fought this barrier, enrolled in high school French and passed with success. Such practices, although potentially influencing identity construction in negative ways, were not internalized by Kailyn or Deborah. In fact, these stories illustrate how individuals can resist discursive practices. Both Deborah and Kailyn refused to accept these possible representations of self; and instead, their stories positioned them as resistors and successes as they narrated their achievements in their French classes.

The previous discussion focused on some of the ways the normalcy/difference binary manifested itself in the texts Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah shared with me. I concentrated the description on the participants' family contexts and educational contexts; however, a variation of the normalcy/difference binary also appeared in the stories that the three women shared about their experiences within the Deaf community. This will be discussed in a section exploring Deaf cultural discourses and identity politics. Next, I present an exploration of how Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah invoked discourses of passing as they shared their life stories with me.

Discourses of passing.

Passing describes the process whereby individuals who deviate from the majority perform and present self as close to the norm as possible. Similar to the interconnectedness between discourses of normalcy and discourses of difference, passing does not operate in

isolation. Passing exists and finds its meaning in relationship to the normalcy/difference binary. In fact, after reflecting on how discourses of passing were at work in the stories, it appeared that discourses of passing emerged as an attempt to mitigate the marginalizing effects of the discourses of normalcy and difference. Passing was the work taken to minimize, disguise and/or hide difference from the norm, and, therefore, 'pass' as normal. Goffman (1963) described passing as the attempts of the "discredited" individual [the one differing from the norm] to act "as if his [sic] known differentness were irrelevant" (p. 42).

At times, Kailyn, Maria and Deborah drew upon discourses of passing in their life stories. All three narrated stories where they worked to minimize, disguise, and/or hide their hearing losses and the signs of their hearing loss. These stories were most observable in the participants' life stories during their school-age years.

Participants engaged in passing when performing their oral deaf identities. Using speech, auditory skills and lipreading reproduced how hearing people communicate and minimized the noticeable difference of their hearing loss. Maria spoke of being an oral success (line 50). Kailyn drew attention to her ability to succeed academically on par with her hearing classmates (line 244). And a number of times Deborah told of her excellent speech abilities, describing how her speech skills were so accomplished that people couldn't even tell she was deaf, aiding her efforts at passing. For example,

> By that age [10] my speech was perfect. People, they didn't know I was deaf. My voice sounded like hearing people. My mom said, "Your voice is perfect, different from many other deaf who you can tell they are deaf by their voice. But you can't tell by your voice that you're deaf." . . . at that time I had very clear speech. And my lipreading was perfect. And I was almost like a *normal hearing person* at that time (Deborah, lines 960 – 966, italics added for emphasis).

Another way that the three participants performed discourses of passing was in their stories of trying to hide or minimize their deafness and the visible signs of hearing loss. Beginning in grade 8 Kailyn refused to wear her hearing aids and FM system in school (Kailyn, lines 1369 – 1381). Maria grew her hair shoulder length in order to "hide" her hearing aids (e.g., Maria, lines 586 – 588; 351 - 361). Maria also described her felt shame of being different and expressed the pressure she felt to hide her hearing loss from others. She stated, "When I was growing up I was very confused about my hearing loss. Before I was

ashamed. I hid. I hid that I had a hearing loss. I thought that they'd treat me differently or something" (Maria lines 1256 – 1259). Similarly, Deborah did not tell classmates or other hearing individuals that she was deaf. Deborah explained,

> I never told people that I was deaf. I never warned anyone. I just carried on with my
> life and tried to make it through... at that age, teenagers and all, I thought if I told
> them that I was deaf they might be, "Oh, you're deaf *gasp*!" And they'd be afraid that
> maybe they would catch it or I'd give it to them. Or maybe they'd feel awkward and
> not know how to relate to me. And I didn't want their pity because I'm deaf. So, I
> never told them that I was deaf. So, all through high school they didn't know I was
> deaf until graduation night when they found out and they were all so shocked
> [Deborah, lines 1337 – 1351].

In addition to illustrating stories of passing, Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's narratives highlight the work that was necessary to undertake in order to pass and minimize the effects of their hearing loss. All three women told of sacrifices that their mothers made in order to ensure that their daughters developed clear speech. A quote from Maria illustrates:

> Well, when I was growing up, my mom, she sacrificed her time for me. [After she
> discovered that I had a hearing loss] she decided to take me to a speech therapist. I
> would go there for speech, once a week. But that wasn't enough, so my mom would
> come with me to speech and learn how to do speech therapy with me. So then at
> home, oh, I remember over and over and over again doing speech therapy, and she
> would help me with like the different phonetics and practicing with me and trying to
> get the softer sounds, like "s", and she would help me to make sure that I had proper
> clear speech. (Maria, lines 553 – 567)

Additionally, all three women emphasized the added school work that was necessary to do in order to keep up with their hearing classmates. Deborah stated, "It was tough. High school was tough. Part of that is related to being deaf and being oral. I made it. I did make it through those classes without any interpreter" (Deborah, lines 1884 – 1886). Similarly, Kailyn explained:

> And I guess one thing about me, as a deaf person in a hearing class, was that I had to
> work twice as hard. I'd study constantly because I couldn't get all the information in

the classroom. So it was double the work having to read things all over again and having to make sure that I got it. Or write it again (Kailyn, lines 670 – 675).

A further dimension of the work required to pass involved the strategies that the women developed to assist them in passing. Stories from the participants' narratives point to some strategies that the women used to minimize the stigma of their hearing loss. For example, a story told by Maria illustrates how she relied on visual information to figure what was happening and what might be expected of her. She shared,

> I'll never forget. I was camping with the girl scouts. I had to be so alert because I couldn't hear with my hearing aids off. And at night, I was just so scared. People would be talking but it was so hard to follow them at night in the dark. I couldn't hear them and they would be talking. I had to learn to survive; uh, I would just follow people. And of course, that's just normal deaf behaviour. You try and figure out what's going on in the environment, and you just pretend that you know what's going on – it's a survival skill. You can't hear so you have to rely on visual information and try to piece it all together (Maria, lines 500 – 510).

Maria also spoke of pretending to understand what was being communicated and responding yes or no in order to appear that she knew what had been said.

> Many of the people I grew up with didn't know that I was hard of hearing. Well, when people talked to me I would pretend that I understood what was going on. I would just answer, "yeah." I'd pretend. I'd answer yes or no. And I would think to myself. "Geeze, be careful what you answer yes to." (Maria, lines 661 – 666).

Deborah and Kailyn pointed to the importance of determination and not giving up. For example, Deborah stated,

> I wouldn't allow being deaf to get in my way. It was like, you know, of course I'm deaf but I can do it. I wouldn't let it prevent me from doing anything. But I had this 'can-do' attitude and my mom knew I was a very, very 'stubborn' girl when I was growing up. And I wanted to be involved in things. And if I wanted to do it, then do it. I wouldn't let deafness get in my way (Deborah, lines 1191 – 1197).

Goffman (1963) suggested that passing requires energy and effort, carrying with it emotional and psychological burdens. He argued that the person who is passing carries the burden of when "to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to

lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where" (p. 44). Previous researchers (Melick,1999; Schowe, 1979; Weinberg & Sterrit, 1986), studying hearing loss and identity, theorized that deaf and hard of hearing individuals who take on the role of passing, trying to measure up to a hearing norm, experience marginality. Kailyn, Maria and Deborah's stories illustrate some emotional and psychological consequences that they endured. However, as Goffman pointed out, some individuals are able to take on this performance with a higher degree of success than others. In fact, Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's stories portrayed varied successes at passing. In narrating her life story, Deborah seemed to express the least amount dissonance while attempting to live as an oral deaf person in a hearing world, at least until she was exposed to Deaf cultural discourses; by contrast, Maria's and Kailyn's stories emphasized marginality as a consequence of their efforts to pass.

Both Maria and Kailyn conveyed the experience of living "between worlds." Kailyn's endeavours to succeed in hearing classes during her school years left her feeling alienated – not fitting in with either the deaf or hearing students. The deaf students saw Kailyn as trying to be hearing and the hearing students rejected her because she was not hearing:

> All my life, I guess, I felt like I was doubly isolated. Meaning, the deaf kids would look at me as being in the hearing world. I was mostly in hearing classes. They were jealous and they'd make fun of me, insult me, reject me because I didn't stay with them and I was in the hearing class. But then in the hearing class they would look at me like, there I was the deaf kid and they'd reject me and tease me because I was deaf. So I didn't really have close friends. I didn't fit in either world. I was somewhere between (Kailyn, lines 440 – 448).

Maria spoke of the emotional pain that she endured because of the internalized pressure she felt to pass and keep up appearances that everything was fine.

> [When people asked how I was doing?] I would say, "fine." "Everything's fine. There's no problem." But was it really fine? No! It wasn't. It's like I was really aware that I was different from the other students in high school. I mean I had hearing aids. No one else in the school had a hearing aid. Why did I wear hearing aids? Why did I talk funny? Why did I talk differently from the other kids? . . . I wasn't honest about the difficulties I was having. But that was my personality. Like, "I'm fine, I'm fine."

But inside I really wasn't. I was wearing a mask. Keeping up an appearance that

everything was fine. I put on a good front (Maria, lines 231 – 247).

The women's stories illustrate how efforts to pass require energy and effort, and these efforts may carry with them emotional and psychological burdens. This raises the question as to whether there are alternative responses to the pressures to "pass." In the case of all three participants, one of the alternatives that they found was incorporating Deaf cultural discourses in how they constructed identities.

Deaf Cultural Discourses

All three women were exposed to discourses of normalcy and its binary partner, discourses of difference, in their early and school-age years. These discourses were powerful shapers of their identities. However, when the women completed high school and began their young adult years, a change began. All three were introduced to a new way of making meaning of hearing loss. They began a journey into a Deaf world where Deaf cultural discourses permeate the cultural practices of the Deaf community.

The Deaf community is not defined by its geography; instead, heterogeneous individuals who make up the community assign membership based on the sensory difference of hearing loss and adherence to and performance of Deaf cultural values. Within the Deaf community, discourses abound that counter the ways discourses of normalcy and difference construct hearing loss as aberrant, a defect of the human body. Instead, Deaf cultural discourses offer alternative language practices where hearing loss is seen merely as physical difference. Difference is re-storied. Thus, all three participants began drawing upon Deaf cultural discourses, re-storying how they made meaning of living with a hearing loss. They began the process of becoming members of the Deaf community and performing a Deaf identity.

Like Foster (1989) who found that the Deaf adults in her study were drawn to the Deaf community both because of alienation from hearing persons and identification with Deaf peers, Maria and Kailyn expressed similar motivations for their attraction and movement towards the Deaf world.

In Maria's narrative, she communicated the inner conflict she felt trying to pass as an oral deaf person in a hearing environment. She presented a self who was ashamed of her hearing loss and a self who worked hard to hide this difference. However, her entrance to

Gallaudet University represented the beginning of a journey into the Deaf world. Through her introduction to the Deaf cultural practices present at Gallaudet University, Maria began re-storying her understanding of hearing loss and subsequently how she went about constructing selves. Maria explained,

> I started the New Signers Program at Gallaudet and it really impacted me because there were all these other hard of hearing people, like me. . . And that was the first time that I realized that I was not the only one, I was not alone. . . . It's like when I went to Gallaudet my true colours came out. I was more open. That's one of the things I noticed about going to Gallaudet (Maria, lines 317-321; 357 – 360).

Later she added,

> [Because of Gallaudet] I felt good about myself: who I am. I became a way more social person. . . . After Gallaudet, if I met hearing people I would tell them, "I'm hard of hearing." I don't think I would have done that if I hadn't gone to Gallaudet. If I hadn't gone to Gallaudet, would I feel comfortable telling people I am hard of hearing? I don't know what my life would have been like if I hadn't ever gone to Gallaudet (Maria, lines 805 – 814).

After Gallaudet, Maria began embracing a Deaf identity and incorporating Deaf cultural discourses as she constructed her identities (lines 822 – 828).

Kailyn began entering the Deaf community following her graduation from high school. Similar to participants of Foster's (1989) study, Kailyn expressed being drawn to the Deaf community, based both on alienation from hearing persons and an identification with Deaf peers. She described the beginning of this transition:

> [Following her stay in Whistler in an all-hearing environment] . . . And that year, it's interesting because I decided to be more involved with Deaf people. It was such a struggle always interacting with hearing people. Uh, communication issues. I had had a few hearing boyfriends and one of the things I had noticed was that there was communication breakdowns. And they didn't understand Deaf culture, like how to get attention. They just didn't get it and they didn't have the patience (Kailyn, lines 1000 – 1007).

She went on to describe that as she became more involved with Deaf people she embraced a new identity, a culturally Deaf identity.

As I explored more where I fit, um, you know, I started meeting more Deaf people: all the people that I had started preschool with and gone through school with, and then they maybe transferred to the school for the deaf. Well, they all started coming back home. And, I guess the most important thing was that I found my identity. I found that I am Deaf and that's what happened during that time of my life. I think that of the little things that happened, all the cumulative experiences, I just realized that "I'm Deaf." (Kailyn, lines 1122 – 1132).

Deborah's journey into the Deaf world began as she became reacquainted with oral deaf students with whom she attended preschool and elementary school. These former friends now used sign language and introduced her to the Deaf community (Deborah, lines 2084 – 2089). Similar to the participants in Foster's (1989) study and to Kailyn and Maria, Deborah expressed the impetus for her entry into the Deaf community as an attraction to sameness. She outlined her growing curiosity to explore what it would be like to be with other deaf people who were the same as her (lines 1787 – 1789). However, a conscious feeling of alienation from hearing persons did not drive Deborah's attraction to the Deaf community. In fact, she shared that it was only in hindsight that she began to recognize that she had missed out on opportunities (e.g., social opportunities) because of living as a deaf person in the hearing world. It was not until she was exposed to Deaf cultural discourses that she assigned new meanings to her previous experiences as an oral deaf person. The following quote illustrates Deborah's experiences:

I didn't really realize that there was something missing at that time. It wasn't until after I was involved in the Deaf community. It's something I realized in retrospect. After getting involved in the Deaf community, I looked back at my life when I was growing up and realized that there was something missing, gaps. And you know, learning more about deafness and figuring out, "Wow! I'm Deaf." After, I identified myself as Deaf (Deborah, lines 3639 – 3644).

I [went] through a time of trying to figure out who I was. I was realizing that I was Deaf. That that's me: that my identity is in the Deaf community. And I wanted to have a chance. I told [my mom], "I grew up oral for you. Now it's my turn. Sign is easy. Oral communication is frustrating. And I'm learning sign." I explained, "It's a language and it's the language of who I am. I'm Deaf, Period, and that's it. I can't do

anything about that part of who I am. I am Deaf. That's it. I have a new language, a new life. Well, not a new life, but a new language." And I guess that kind of changed her from then on and she realized how important Deaf culture was. That it was my identity. I said, "You're Italian. That's your identity. Well, I'm Deaf. That's me."

And things really changed after that.

All three women's narratives described a similar process of identity construction. All three women were raised in hearing-oriented environments where the normalcy/difference binary was pervasive. The women drew on these discourses when constructing their identities and engaged in activities of passing. However, after high school, Kailyn, Maria and Deborah embarked on a journey into the Deaf world, where they were exposed to alternative language practices of the Deaf community. All three women began to draw on Deaf cultural discourses as they constructed their identities, re-storying the meaning of deafness. These identity discourses, however, continued to contradict, overlap, coexist and compete within the narratives. All three women embraced a Deaf cultural identity as a political identity marker; however, they continued to perform additional identities that existed alongside their self-defined Deaf cultural identities. In fact, for all three women, tension continued to exist around their identities. This can be observed in the stories the women shared regarding identity politics in the Deaf community.

identity politics.

Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's narratives demonstrated ongoing negotiations of identity construction within the Deaf community. Previously, I discussed how the normal/different binary was at work creating categories of 'insider'/'outsider' and that an underlying assumption of this binary was a societal standard of normality based on a human body ideal and norm. My investigation of the three participants' identity constructions within the Deaf community revealed that a normal/different binary continued to be at work, however, in this context the standard of normal was situated in Deaf cultural discourses. According to a Deaf cultural standard or norm, individuals are judged as culturally Deaf ('insider') or deaf ('outsider') based on their background and adherence to Deaf cultural values. Skelton and Valentine (2003) pointed out that having an audiological hearing loss does not guarantee membership in the Deaf community. In fact, being raised in hearing-oriented environments where oral communication was valued positioned Kailyn, Maria, and

Deborah as outsiders working to gain acceptance and membership in the Deaf community. Skelton and Valentine explained that "unconditional support from the Deaf community 'is not readily extended to deaf people in transition . . . Deaf people must abide by the rule of the culture to benefit from its support'" (p. 453). All three women told stories of their ongoing negotiations within the Deaf community.

Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah told of stories where their self-defined Deaf identities were challenged as they navigated identity construction with members of the Deaf community. For example, Deborah explained that because of her oral background, some Deaf individuals used the derogatory sign THINK-HEARING when referring to her (line 2013). She resisted these representations and instead constructed herself as a culturally Deaf woman. The following quote illustrates her resistance:

> [When people question if I'm culturally Deaf, I react by saying,] "Pffssst, I'm Deaf. Hello. Yup, I'm Deaf." Now a day when people ask me about my history I don't say, "I grew up hard of hearing." I say, "I grew up orally." And I say, "Deaf." You know I'm Deaf. I sign. Some Deaf today think I'm hard of hearing. They'll say, "Oh you know how to speak so you must be hard of hearing." "I'm not hard of hearing. I'm profoundly deaf." They'll say, "But you can speak so you must be hard of hearing." That's their perspective, I guess. So they label me hard of hearing and I'll say, "Don't label me hard of hearing. That's not what I am." So I'll ask them, "How do you decide whether to label someone hard of hearing? or Deaf? Whose labels? I'm profoundly deaf, period. Why do you call me hard of hearing because I can speak?" It just seems so strange. But for me, from my perspective I know I'm Deaf period and that's it, period. DEAF (Deborah, lines 3677 – 3705).

Similarly, Maria and Kailyn shared experiences of the ongoing negotiation of their culturally Deaf identities. Maria stated,

> . . . there is the politics in the Deaf community. You know, some of them will label me hard of hearing, but we, what does that mean? I mean, I grew up oral. I didn't grow up in a school for the deaf. So you know, it's just terminology. To me, deaf, hard of hearing, whatever you want to call me. I don't care. Yeah, culturally I'm Deaf, and yeah, I can talk on a phone. But, I'm not going to hide that I can do that. Of

course, that's a part of who I am, but uh, at the same time it doesn't take away from

who I am as a culturally Deaf person (Maria, lines 822 – 828).

A story from Kailyn illustrates the ongoing and relational aspect of constructing a culturally

Deaf identity. This story demonstrates her resistance to discourses that counter her Deaf

identity.

> It's still a struggle because some ASL Deaf people, … [names deleted]…, they
>
> continue, they've always been criticizing me. And, they try and judge and label me. I
>
> remember one time at a [Deaf event] where there were many Deaf people, one Deaf
>
> person at the event decided to label who was Deaf and deaf. "You're 'D' Deaf.
>
> You're 'd' deaf. 'D', 'd', 'D', 'd.' And I've never felt so humiliated. They called me
>
> 'd' deaf because I have an oral background. And they said, "You know you're more
>
> oral than you are ASL." And I was like, "SO WHAT? I'm DEAF. I'm involved in the
>
> Deaf community. I'm a leader. My parents are hearing but I sign. I'm involved." And
>
> they labeled me 'd' deaf. Forget that. No way! I'm proud to be Deaf, but sometimes I
>
> feel, I feel frustrated with the extremists, the radical Deaf people, those people who
>
> are so extreme. They're out to oppress people like me, and uh, damage our self-
>
> esteem. It's sad that that label system still exists today (Kailyn, lines 1134 – 1158).

Kailyn, Maria and Deborah positioned themselves as culturally Deaf and performed Deaf

identities in their narratives; however, these constructions of identity were ongoing processes

and not static identities. This can be seen in the stories the women told of their ongoing

interactions with their families.

All three women shared that they accepted and performed an oral deaf identity when

they were growing up. However, as they were exposed to Deaf cultural discourses and began

to integrate these discourses in how they constructed identities, shifts took place within the

family context. One way these shifts began to manifest themselves was in the women's

acceptance of ASL as their preferred method of communication. ASL was a vehicle for the

three women to perform their culturally Deaf identities. A quote from Deborah illustrates:

> My dad doesn't accept that I'm deaf. He got so angry when I started learning sign
>
> language. He said, "What's that for? What good is that? We spent all this money on
>
> speech training." He's so against sign language. But I wanted to show him that
>
> "Look, I'm Deaf" (Deborah, lines 2071 – 2074).

There is an intimate connection between ASL and Deaf cultural identities (Sacks, 1989). Signing was a way for Deborah to show her father her Deaf identity.

Similarly, a story shared by Kailyn demonstrates the ongoing negotiation of identity within her family context. A trip to Gallaudet and the Deaf cultural experiences that she was exposed to influenced her values and how she saw herself.

> My values changed… especially this last year. I went to visit Gallaudet University and when I came back… that experience really influenced me and it raised some issue that are really important to me and that I bring up with my family, my parents (Kailyn, lines 1449 – 1456).

Subsequently, at the time of this research Kailyn was engaging her parents in identity negotiations. The following quote provides an example.

> I'm also at the point where I'm fighting with my parents about how they're going to communicate with my future husband. And that's kind of been a new issue that has arisen for us. "Say uh, what if he's an ASL user and that's how he prefers to communicate what are you going to do? Are you going to learn ASL?" And they respond, "Well, yeah, we'll learn sign." And I'm like, "Wait a minute you're willing to learn sign for a future boyfriend that you don't even know. What about me?" "Why didn't you learn sign language before?" I ask them that, "Why haven't you learned for me?" My mom's really strong about the choices that she made for me (sigh). She says, "You turned out fine. What's the problem?" and I say, "Yeah, but still, now as an adult. I use Sign. So why won't you learn sign and sign with me now as an adult?" Now there's increasing conflict in the family (Kailyn, lines 1433 – 1448).

These examples demonstrate that the women continue to navigate the process of identity construction within the Deaf community and family contexts.

Discussion: Revisiting a Narrative Perspective

The preceding discussion has focused on how discourses of normalcy, discourses of difference, discourses of passing and Deaf cultural discourses were at work in the participants' narratives. The purpose was to describe and provide examples of these discourses at work in the participants' stories. The preceding discussion, however, does not explicitly capture the complexities of the multiple and competing plot lines as the three

women constructed their identities. The previous discussion, because of the way it is written, appears to unfold in a developmental, progressive form. This parallels the unfolding narratives of the participants' life stories. The interview guide [Appendix D] used in the present study asked participants to think of their lives as books. It encouraged them to think of their lives in chapters. Therefore, the interview guide encouraged a progressive and linear life story, progressing from early life to current issues. My description of how the four discourses were at work in the participants' narratives followed the sequential representation of the life stories. This seemed to offer a clear description of some of the ways the discourses were at work in the participants' life stories; however, it failed to capture the complexities of the competing, overlapping and contradictory identities. As Mishler (1999) cautioned,

> We can easily extract chronologies from [participants'] accounts, these sequential orderings of events and episodes linked together by the familiar narrative conjunction, "and then." But it would be misleading to read them as progressive, that is, as linear, continuous movement through developmental stages... I am not arguing that our lives are chaotic, nor suggesting we cannot construct meaningful narratives of our experiences – our life stories. However, if our stories represent our lives with any adequacy, then they must leave room for the complex interplay of multiple and sometimes competing plot lines (p. 80).

Thus, in this section I attempt to refocus and shift the analysis to the complexities of Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's narrative identities. I will illustrate this by re-examining what appears to be the progressive development of a Deaf cultural identity as though it is a fixed and stable category.

A poststructural narrative view of identities posits that identities are multiple, multilayered, and in process. The possible inference that individuals develop through progressive stages of identity formation, arriving at the final stage as a culturally Deaf individual, does not fit with this perspective. In fact, in line with a poststructural, narrative view, Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's life stories portray that their Deaf cultural identities coexist, compete, contradict and overlap with other constructions of identities. For example, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah share identity discourses where they construct selves as both deaf and Deaf. According to Deaf cultural discourses, Deaf individuals who were raised orally do not take pride in their previous oral successes. In fact, there is a cultural value that

has been to deny or suppress oral abilities. As illustrated previously, all three participants told stories of their oral successes and conveyed a pride and, at times, gratitude to their parents for having raised them orally. These identity discourses constructing a 'd' deaf identity, or arguably a hard of hearing identity, coexisted with the numerous stories where participants constructed a Deaf identity. Rather than perpetuating a binary view of these identities, that a deaf individual is either 'd'eaf or 'D'eaf, the life stories of Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah illustrate that a Deaf identity is not a fixed or stable category. The three women's narratives disrupt a binary approach to understanding hearing loss and identities and show that, "as a category of identity, hearing status is complex and can be fluid over time and space, reflecting shifting identities and positionalities" (N. Israelite, Unpublished abstract).

Self-Reflexivity

Reflecting on the preceding discussion, a tension emerges between my poststructural analysis of the women's narratives and their emphatic self-assertions of a Deaf cultural identity. As previously discussed, the readings across the stories represent my interpretations of the participants' stories. I did not collaborate with the participants for this section of my research. Therefore, it is unknown to what degree the women may agree or disagree with my analysis that their identities were multiple, contradictory, competing, and overlapping. However, I believe writings from Butler (1990), a feminist and queer theorist, provide valuable insights into this dilemma. Butler wrote about the instability of categories (e.g., woman). She explained that categories, such as 'woman,' have historically constituted a "subject for whom political representation is pursued" (p. 3). Therefore, the category 'woman' has served political utility and viability. In fact, in sociohistorical contexts in which women's lives have been either misrepresented or not represented at all, it can be argued that the category 'woman' has served to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects. However, drawing on poststructural insights, Butler has argued that the category 'woman' has become destabilized and that there are growing critiques of what exactly constitutes the category 'woman.' In a comparable way, the political markers of identity invoked by Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah, emphasize their culturally Deaf identities. Given that Deaf people's lives and experiences have historically been misrepresented or not represented at all, the participants' constructions of a 'Deaf' cultural identity serve as politically valuable and important identity markers. A poststructural analysis destabilizes the

category Deaf. The questions remain: Is this analysis useful? Can a poststructural analysis add to the political debates and extend the discussion without undermining the political importance of the category 'Deaf' to Deaf people?

CHAPTER SIX

A REVIEW OF THE EMPIRICAL LITERATURE CONCERNING

IDENTITY AND DEAFNESS

The next chapter presents a review of the empirical literature concerning identity and deafness. I first discuss the early studies (Schowe, 1979; Wienberg & Sterritt, 1986) that laid the groundwork for subsequent researchers. Second, studies (Glickman, 1993: Melick, 1999) investigating Deaf identity theories are explored. Third, I examine studies (Bat-Chava, 2000; Fischer & McWirter, 2001; Glickman, 1993; Gordon, 1998; Grushkin,1997; Israelite et al., 2002; Kent, 2003; Leigh, 1999; Leigh, Marcus, Dobosh, & Allen, 1998; Melick, 1999; Moschella, 1993; Overstreet, 1999; Rose, 2001; Roy, 1996; Stinson, Whitmore, & Kluwin, 1996) in which the researchers have explored variables and factors influencing identity paradigms. Fourth, I discuss two autoethnographic studies (Finn, 1995; Searls & Johnson, 1996) in which the researcher is the subject. Fifth, I discuss the emerging scholarship interested in hard of hearing identities. Finally, I discuss the implications of these studies in light of the present findings.

"Early" Studies

Historical interest in the topic of self and identity dates back to early Greek philosophers (Ashmore & Jussim, 1997). However, the literature on deafness and identity represents a recent convergence, with one of the first works, *Identity Crisis in Deafness*, written by B.M. Schowe in 1979. Using naturalistic science, specifically descriptive phenomenology, Schowe examined written autobiographical accounts of deaf people. A major theme he identified in the autobiographies was the occurrence of an "identity crisis." Schowe argued that the "identity crisis" resulted from the deaf individuals having to reconcile their identity against a hearing norm. Based on his research, Schowe described three patterns of adjustment to deafness: 1) Deaf people who reject the hearing world and immerse themselves in the Deaf community; 2) Deaf people who reject the Deaf world and aspire to live comfortably in a hearing society which rejects them; and 3) Deaf people who find commonalities among Deaf and hearing. Schowe speculated the second path is the least healthy of the three, leading to a marginal identity and crisis.

Schowe's work (1979), a naturalistic study describing several case studies, provided important contributions to the area of deafness. First, as a deaf scholar, Schowe was able to reflect on his own personal wisdom about living as a deaf person, and his work provided groundbreaking insight into the topic of identity and deafness. Second, consistent with symbolic interactionism, Schowe's writing highlighted the importance of social contexts in the process of identity formation. It may be argued that his emphasis contributed to the proclivity of subsequent researchers to pay heed to the importance of the multiplicity of physiological, social, and cultural conditions that influence the lives of deaf persons.

Weinberg and Sterritt (1986) were two of the first researchers to measure the "identity choice" of 111 deaf and hard of hearing students at the state school for the deaf. Based on Goffman's (1963) concept of "passing," Weinberg and Sterritt theorized that children with "disabilities" face pressures to "pass" as able-bodied [hearing] persons – to appear, and to behave as able-bodied [hearing] as possible. Like Schowe (1979), Weinberg and Sterritt assumed that deaf and hard of hearing children who tried to measure up to a hearing norm would experience "marginality" or negative consequences.

In order to conduct their investigation, Weinberg and Sterritt (1986) developed a scale which classified participants into three groups: those with a predominant hearing identity (able-bodied identity), those with a primary deaf identity (disabled identity), and those who identified with both groups (dual identity). In addition, Weinberg and Sterritt explored the relationship between the various identities and academic achievement, perceived family acceptance of the deaf individual's disability, and self-evaluation. The findings consistently demonstrated that a predominant hearing identity was "associated with poorer outcomes in terms of academic placement, social relationships, personal adjustment, and perceived family acceptance" (p. 101). The best outcomes on all measures used were those associated with dual identities.

Educational placements play a crucial role in deaf and hard of hearing children's developmental experiences (Leigh, 1999), and a multiplicity of education placements exist for deaf and hard of hearing children. The participants in Weinberg's and Sterritt's (1986) study were all from one state school for the deaf. Therefore, in addition to being historically situated, the findings are situated within the context of a state school for the deaf. A possible limitation that Weinberg and Sterritt discussed was the simplicity of the measures they

developed (the Deaf Identity Scale, the Evaluation of the Self as a Deaf Person Scale, and the Perceived Family Acceptance Measure). Despite recognizing the situatedness and possible limitations of Weinberg and Sterritt's study, the findings contributed knowledge and insights regarding how pressures to assume a hearing identity may have negative consequences for academic achievement, family relationships, social relationships, and personal adjustment. Also, Weinberg and Sterritt's development of a Deaf Identity Scale was most likely a contributing factor to subsequent researchers' (e.g., Glickman, 1993) insterest in developing a more sophisticated Deaf Identity Scale.

<div align="center">Deaf Identity Theories</div>

In the 1980s, the Deaf cultural movement gained increasing momentum. Across North America, Deaf communities organized demonstrations at various levels of government advocating for recognition of American Sign Language as a legitimate language. Also, in 1988, a monumental "revolution" took place at Gallaudet University (the only liberal arts university for deaf students in the world) – the Deaf President Now protest. In fact, the students and their supporters effectively shut down the university until the appointed hearing president was forced to resign and the first Deaf president of any university was appointed. Against the backdrop of these historic events and growing interest in the concept of a Deaf identity, researchers (Glickman, 1993, 1996; Melick, 1999) conducted research focusing on the development of a Deaf cultural identity.

Glickman (1993, 1996) was interested in the development of a Deaf identity and so he set out "to formulate and test a model for the development of culturally Deaf identities" (1993, p. 1) and "to construct an instrument, the Deaf Identity Development Scale (DIDS), to measure cultural identity in deaf people" (p. 12). Glickman (1993) theorized that deaf people's understanding of themselves develops and goes through predictable and recognizable stages. Drawing on a theory of Black Identity Development, Glickman (1993) theorized that a member of a minority (e.g., a deaf person) experiences some state of alienation from his or her [minority] community. This alienation is then interrupted by the discovery of oppression.

> He or she then becomes immersed in this community, falling in love with everything pertaining to it, and becoming angry with the larger society. The minority person then enters a period of reflection where his or her vision of what it means to belong to this

community enlarges. A final stage of biculturalism, which often includes a commitment to political action, is then achieved (Glickman, 1993, p. 62).

However, Cross (1991) criticized an underlying assumption of the black identity development theory in that it presumed that "some stages of identity are more positively correlated with mental health than others" (Glickman, 1993, p. 8). Cross (1991) set out to explode this connection. In his revised theory, Cross concluded that there are really two kinds of pre-encounter Black identities. One can be a self-hating Black, but one can also simply be a Black person with an assimilationist, Eurocentric and White cultural orientation. Glickman incorporated the criticism of Cross in an attempt to avoid a naïve acceptance of positing a relationship between the different stages of identity development and mental health.

Building on these theoretical beliefs, Glickman set out to develop a theory of Deaf identity development. He identified four developmental stages: the "culturally hearing," which refers to people who hold the dominant culture's attitudes and beliefs about hearing loss; the "culturally marginal," which refers to people who have shifting loyalties and confusion regarding their relationship to the Deaf and hearing worlds; the "immersion identity," which refers to the "radical or militant" Deaf stance; and the "Bicultural identity," which refers to individuals who have integrated their Deaf pride in a balanced way into their full humanity. Based on these categories, Glickman and a team of culturally sensitive consultants set out to design a scale to measure these four identities. Using a written or videotaped version of the scale, Glickman recruited a heterogeneous group of participants from the Association of Late Deafened Adults and from the student body at Gallaudet University to complete the scale. Glickman (1993) found that there was support for the four kinds of deaf cultural identities as defined by the Deaf Identity Development Scale (DIDS), but he did not find support for his proposed theory of deaf bicultural identity formation, a proposed developmental model.

One of the reasons for the lack of support for Glickman's theory might have been the method he used. A scale designed to assess the attitudes related to being culturally Deaf may not be a suitable tool for exploring a complex process such as identity development (Glickman, 1993). Glickman had participants complete the scale only once; thus, his data reflected only snapshots of the individuals' identity formation. Glickman proposed a stage

theory of Deaf identity development, but the one-time measure was unable to capture the developmental process.

Despite the lack of support for Glickman's theory about Deaf identity development, Glickman contributed a valuable measure (DIDS) to the research community. For instance, using the DIDS Glickman found support for numerous variables which might influence and shape cultural identity, such as the importance of parents who sign, age of onset of hearing loss, preference for ASL, and educational experiences. Thus, the DIDS has continued to be used to help researchers identify identity categories and learn more about the various identity paradigms.

Melick (1999) was also interested in developing a model of Deaf identity development. Using qualitative methods, Melick explored the developmental paths of culturally Deaf adults. She identified variables and factors associated with Deaf identity development and then used grounded theory to develop a model of Deaf identity development. Melick's findings are based on her in-depth interviews with 10 deaf participants. The participants were all born into hearing families, had early childhood hearing loss, and were educated in a mainstream setting. Five were female and five were male. Finally, all the participants were "Caucasian" and ranged from 19 to 64 years of age.

Like Schowe (1979), Melick (1999) found that the sense of being different from hearing people, "and therefore an outsider," was an important factor that came to bear in each phase of the individual's Deaf identity formation (p. 84). Melick outlined a theory of Deaf identity development that involved four progressive stages. According to Melick, a deaf individual identifies first as "being an outsider". During this stage the deaf person tries to "pass as a hearing person to the best of his/her ability" (p. 84). The next stage, encountering/connecting, is initiated when the individual is exposed to the Deaf community. In the middle phase, transitioning, the person starts to move into the Deaf world. Finally, in the fourth phase, self-definition, "the person refuses to let others make him/her feel like an outsider. The person starts to define for his/herself who s/he is and where s/he fits in the world" (p. 84).

Melick (1999) argued that her model was "more comprehensive" than that proposed by Glickman (1993). A shortcoming, however, is her failure to caution readers of the implicit

connection Glickman (1993) warned of, namely, erroneously associating some stages of identity development with positive progress and self-acceptance.

Both Glickman (1993) and Melick (1999) provided insight and stimulated curiousity about the ways deaf individuals develop Deaf identities. Their works underlined the importance of considering the complexity of variables and factors influencing identity formation. One criticism I would argue, based on a postmodern view of identity, is that Glickman (1993) and Melick (1999) assumed a progressive, developmental process to identity formation. Increasingly, researchers (e.g., Arvay, 1999; Bateson, 1989; Gergen, 2001; Josselson, 1996; Mishler, 1999; Richardson, 1997) argued against a linear progressive notion of development and advised that life is lived multidimensionally, and involves both continuity and change. Also, is it possible that individuals move between various identities or occupy more than one identity at a time?

<div align="center">Research Investigating Variables and Factors</div>

<div align="center">Influencing Identity Paradigms</div>

Since Glickman's first attempts (1993, 1996) to identify the variables and factors influencing Deaf identity formation, subsequent researchers have undertaken similar investigations with the goal of expanding our knowledge about deafness and identity, and the complex factors influencing identity. One group of researchers has implemented studies using the DIDS and a second group has employed exploratory qualitative studies exploring the variables that influence identity paradigms relating to deafness, such as culturally hearing and culturally Deaf. This next section looks at these two groups of studies, specifically focusing on the factors and variables that the researchers investigated in their respective studies.

<div align="center">*Studies Employing the DIDS*</div>

The earliest study using the DIDS was Glickman's (1993) research where he devised and used the scale for the first time. In this study Glickman found support for the importance of parents who sign, the preference to communicate in ASL, and the type of school one attends as contributing to the development of a Deaf identity. Since the publication of that research, others (Bat-Chava, 2000; Fischer, 2000; Fischer & McWhirter, 2001; Leigh, 1999; Leigh et al., 1998) have applied the scale in subsequent studies and investigated the relationship between various identities and sense of self. For example, Bat-Chava, (2000),

Fischer (2000), and Gordon (1998) found that participants' cultural identities influenced the way the individuals evaluated self. The category of bicultural identity was associated with higher ratings on self-concept and self-esteem than the other identity categories of the DIDS, such as the marginal identity (Bat-Chava, 2000; Fischer, 2000; Gordon, 1998).

Like Glickman (1993), other researchers (Bat-Chava, 2000; Fischer & McWhirter, 2001; Leigh et al., 1998) became interested in how the complex variables associated with deafness affected cultural identification. Leigh et al. (1998) set out to revise the DIDS to be applicable to hearing participants, in addition to deaf participants. Their efforts were guided by a view of the Deaf community that includes hearing individuals (e.g., hearing children of deaf parents). Their analysis was aimed at determining the impact of hearing status and parental hearing status on the different cultural scales. Their findings suggested that "the experience of being deaf/hard of hearing with hearing parents influences one's identity development in a way that is significantly different from the identity development for a hearing or deaf/hard of hearing person of deaf parents" (p. 336).

Fischer and McWhirter (2001) also set out to revise the DIDS and collect evidence of reliability and validity. They were specifically interested in how an individual's experience of hearing loss (e.g., severity and age of onset) was associated with one's cultural identification. They found that "age of onset and severity of hearing loss do seem to be related to one's deaf identity development" (p. 357). For example, prelingually deaf people scored higher on both the immersion identity and bicultural identity scales where as hard of hearing people scored higher on the hearing identity scale.

Bat-Chava (2000), recognizing the great diversity and complexity of the deaf experience, sought to identify the four cultural identities in a sample of 267 deaf adults and then to "identify differences in family and school histories and in the self-esteem in adults with each of the identities" (p. 422). Bat-Chava's work was rooted in social identity theory, which posits that an individual will identify with a group if the group contributes positive aspects to her social identity (Taijfel, 1981). Bat-Chava (2000) identified variables contributing either positive or negative aspects to a person's identity. Bat-Chava included method of communication (importance of sign vs. speech), group identification (percentage of deaf friends and level of involvement in the Deaf community), attitude toward deaf people, family deafness orientation, and school deafness orientation. His findings contributed

insight and further understanding about the various identity paradigms and how complex factors associated with deafness are related to the four cultural identities.

The measures tested and developed in these studies have provided useful tools for enhancing the understanding of identity paradigms. Furthermore, the care of the researchers to promote and respect the complex factors associated with hearing loss (e.g., age of onset, parental hearing status, educational experiences) highlight the importance of embracing an ecological perspective of deafness for future researchers. Lastly, the emphasis on classificatory labels as found in these studies (e.g., hearing, bicultural, hard of hearing, deaf) highlight the importance that these constructs have for deaf people in how they self-identify and the researchers interested in investigating hearing loss and identity. One of the researchers (Leigh, 1999) explained that often these constructs tend to indicate an individual's choice about self-representation. For example, a deaf person's answer to the question of whether they refer to themselves as deaf, Deaf, hearing-impaired, or hard of hearing, has implications for an individual's choice about self-representation.

The above-mentioned studies using the DIDS, adopted a developmental view of identity formation. Therefore, a limitation of the studies using the DIDS was the use of a one-time measure. A one-time measure only reflects a snapshot of a complex process like identity formation. Another limitation is related to using a scale with preexisting categories to measure identities. Perhaps other ways of categorizing identity are possible. In fact, Sheridan (2000) used a qualitative approach to explore how deaf children determine identity. Sheridan found that the children's definitions of identity categories were not based on cultural or medical perspectives of deafness as discussed in the literature. Instead the children based their views on overt visual indicators, such as a person's method of communication. This example highlights an important caution to researchers relying exclusively on deductive research paradigms, to recognize that pre-determined categories and definitions do not allow for new definitions and categories to emerge. The next section will discuss studies using methods which may complement the findings of the studies employing the DIDS (and revised versions of it).

Qualitative Approaches to Deaf Identity Development

The next group of researchers (Foster, 1989; Moschella, 1993; Overstreet, 1999; Rose, 2001; Roy, 1996) employed qualitative methods in their efforts to explore the factors

influencing the process of identity formation with deaf and hard of hearing participants. All decisions in research, including which method to employ, have strengths and limitations. One advantage of qualitative approaches is "that they can be used to understand and uncover what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is known" (Melick, 1999, p. 57).   This group of researchers, whose work is discussed in this section, situated themselves within the theoretical tradition of symbolic interactionism. They emphasized the social context in the process of identity formation. In fact, these researchers adopted the view that identity is a complex negotiation between self and society (Baumeister, 1997). Researchers in this group, therefore, have focused their in-depth interviews on the experiences deaf and hard of hearing individuals have had in society, and on how these experiences have shaped their identities. Overall, qualitative approaches have allowed these researchers to explore the process of identity formation by emphasizing context-rich data from the perspectives of the participants.

Foster (1989), who did not explicitly focus on identity formation, contributed a valuable study which has had an impact on subsequent researchers interested in identity formation. Foster used a qualitative approach to collect life histories from informants. These participants were asked to describe their experiences and interactions over time within the general environments of family, school, work, and community. Foster's goal was to describe her participants' shared experiences having to do with "interactions between deaf people and other deaf or hearing people, and to learn about the ways in which these shared experiences contributed to the development of shared perspectives about deafness and the Deaf community" (p. 227). Two major themes were identified. First, informants described experiences of alienation which occurred over a lifetime with hearing people; and second, informants described experiences of identification and acceptance through interactions with other deaf people.

Foster's work (1989) highlighted the importance of family, school, work, and community contexts in the everyday experiences of deaf people. This emphasis is significant to social scientists concerned with identity formation because individuals make meaning of their experiences and construct their identities as they live their lives in these crucial environments. Furthermore, Foster's findings that the participants in her study experienced alienation from hearing people and identification with deaf people provide subsequent

researchers with important themes to explore in terms of their relatedness to identity formation.

Moschella (1993) explicitly embarked on the exploration of how an individual's childhood experiences of either sign language or oral rearing were related to identity development. Using a qualitative method, she found that the deaf and hard of hearing participants' experiences of communication philosophies (sign or oral) influenced their identity formation. Those participants who experienced an oral-only approach during their development were more prone to feelings of "shame, isolation, alienation, constraint, and depression" (p. 187) than were the participants who were raised with sign language. Moschella's findings emphasize the importance of communication methods and their potential relationship to identity formation with deaf individuals.

Like Moschella (1993), other researchers (Overstreet, 1999; Rose, 2001; Roy, 1996) have been interested in exploring how particular variables influence identity formation. Roy (1996), using grounded theory, explored seven deaf university students' high school experiences in a mainstream setting and how these experiences influenced identity. She found that all seven participants expressed that educational experiences had contributed to their view of self – identity. Furthermore, she discovered that the seven participants all described hearing loss as being a significant "part" of self.

Overstreet (1999) set out to discover how family, language, and education influenced the personal decision of the deaf participants to identify themselves as either belonging to a unique Deaf culture (Deaf-centred identity) or to a hearing society (hearing-centred identity). Using semi-structured interviews, Overstreet found that family life was the most salient factor for identity choice for the participants in her study. Language choice seemed to occur after identity choice. Educational experiences did not seem to be influential in the participants' experiences of identity formation. Overstreet's findings specifically emphasize the importance of considering how family environment shapes the way deaf individuals understand their identity.

Similarly, Rose (2001) explored the effects of family and educational background on the participants in her study. She found that family experiences were persuasive factors in her participants' identity formation. Contrary to Overstreet's (1999) findings, however, Rose (2001) found that educational experiences were important in how the participants in her

study perceived identity. For example, attendance at a residential school was associated with a strong self-identification as culturally Deaf.

In summary, the qualitative studies exploring hearing loss and identity contributed context-rich findings about the process of identity formation and an exploration of the ways in which many complex variables influences this process. From a poststructuralist perspective, different methods provide different insights about the phenomena being studied, and, therefore, contribute valuable insights, enriching our understandings of human experience. In this light, both groups of studies complement and add to our understandings of the experience of deaf persons as they undertake the task of constructing identities. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that both the first group of studies and the second group of studies both promoted an ecological view of deafness emphasizing the diversity and complexities of the deaf experience.

Autoethnographic Studies – Researcher as Subject

The next group of studies to be discussed is explicitly embedded in the personal experiences of deaf individuals, because the subjects of study are the researchers themselves. In this approach, each author(s) draws on her or his personal experience as a deaf person to share insights from personal knowledge. This section will discusses the work of Finn (1995) and Searls & Johnston (1996).

Finn (1995), in her autoethnographic study[30] took a similar focus to that of Moschella (1993), namely, the method of communication and identity. As Finn discussed and reviewed theoretical and empirical literature pertaining to the development of deaf children, she interspersed her work with provocative "personal testimony" (Tierney, 2000). The specific theme she addressed was the negative consequences being raised orally had on her identity and understandings of self. The negative consequences were attributed to the lack of meaningful interaction through linguistic exchanges. Finn explained that "the success of development – self-concept and identity – is through the ongoing process of social interactions with people surrounding the child, either hearing or deaf. The key to this interaction is communication" (p. 2). Finn argued that the linguistic gaps she experienced as a result of oral-only communication left gaps in her "inner world" (p. 7). The magnitude of

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[30] For an in-depth discussion of autoethnography, see Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. P. (2000).

these gaps was unnoticeable to her until she began learning "AUSLAN[31]". She described, "I gradually learned AUSLAN and it tapped my untouched and awaiting inner world. To my bewilderment for the first time in my life, my own world became meaningful and this enabled me to communicate freely with others" (p. 8). Finn's work, while deviating from traditional social sciences, provides insights into the personal experiences of growing up as a deaf person in an oral-only environment. Finn's article prompts the consideration of the ways in which communication through linguistic means is related to an individual's capacity to construct meaning and its interconnection to identity.

Searls and Johnston (1996), like Finn (1995), explored their personal experiences of deafness. Searls and Johnston were both raised by deaf parents; however, their experiences growing up were dramatically different from one another. Searls was educated in an oral-only day-program and Johnston was educated at a residential school for the deaf. The two authors told their life stories in dialogue with one another. The co-constructed text peruses the complexities of the developmental contexts through which deaf people live their lives and is grounded in the authors' personal lived experiences. Searls and Johnston (1996) discussed family composition, methods of communication, experiences with technological aides, educational placements, and interactions with hearing people. Through personal narration, the authors emphasized the importance of considering the multiplicity of important factors related to hearing loss when seeking to understand the lived experiences of deaf people.

Neither of these works (Finn, 1995; Searls & Johnston, 1996) ascribed to conventional social science methods. However, their legitimacy as social science texts finds its roots in the tradition of postmodern scholarship (i.e., autoethnography – Ellis & Bochner, 2000; life history – Tierney, 2000; personal narratives – Richardson, 1997). Specifically, the contemporary concern of postmodern and feminist scholars (e.g., Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Lather, 1993; Richardson, 1997) over the issue of representation in social science research has legitimized works where the researcher is the subject (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Although vulnerable to traditional criticisms as being unscientific and emotional (Ellis & Bochner), from a poststructural perspective these studies' legitimacy is rooted in the epistemic validity of the lived experiences of the researchers. As Ellis and Bochner

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[31] Australian Sign Language.

maintained, the pragmatic[32] and aesthetic[33] validity (see Lather, 1993) of these studies is demonstrated in the way the stories

> [invite us into] the worlds of experience that are unknown to us, show us the concrete
>
> daily details of people whose lives have been underrepresented [misrepresented,
>
> *added*] or not represented at all, help us to reduce their marginalization, show us how
>
> partial and situated our understanding of the world is (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 748).

Researchers such as Finn (1995) and Searls & Johnston (1996) have contributed valuable insights, enhancing our understandings about the experiences of deaf people.

Studies Exploring a Hard of Hearing Identity

A review of the empirical literature on hearing loss and identity reveals that the majority of research has been conducted to identify the developmental process that Deaf individuals go through in order to identify as culturally Deaf (e.g., Glickman, 1993; Melick, 1999), or studies have been conducted to explore the variables and factors influencing the cultural paradigms associated with hearing loss (e.g., Glickman, 1996; Moschella, 1993). Because attitudinal markers and language choice, rather than degree of hearing loss, characterize a Deaf cultural identity, participants in the previously discussed studies represented a range of audiological hearing losses, including individuals who were hard of hearing. In fact, the previous studies were interested in a range of experiences associated with hearing loss in order to explore their relationship to identity, including severity of hearing loss (e.g., Fischer & McWhirter, 2001). These studies incorporated hard of hearing individuals alongside of deaf individuals. But scholars have begun to argue that the needs of many hard of hearing people differ from those of deaf people (Laszlo, 1994), and the question is being asked, "Is there a hard of hearing identity?" (Laszlo). Discussion on this topic continues. What is clear is that the individuals who have a hearing loss make up an exceedingly diverse group (Laszlo) and research needs to be undertaken to represent this heterogeneity.

The empirical research focusing exclusively on hard of hearing individuals and identity is scarce. This lack of inquiry is surprising given that the number of hard of hearing people is very large – about 70 per 1000 persons (Schein, 1989). Perhaps the lack of research

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[32] Pragmatic value refers to usefulness of the findings. This can be both at the individual and societal level.

[33] Aesthetic validity refers to the degree that the findings invite and provoke an embodied, empathetic response from the readers.

and understanding is influenced by the fact that "a large proportion of hard-of-hearing people completely identify with the larger linguistic and cultural community surrounding them" (Laszlo, 1994). Thus, efforts to integrate into the hearing world contribute to the invisibility, lack of awareness and knowledge about hard of hearing individuals. When research has been conducted on the experiences of hard of hearing individuals and identity, researchers have focused primarily on young peoples' experiences within education placements, typically mainstreamed settings. Conceivably, the number of studies (e.g., Leigh, 1999; Lutes, 1987; Stinson et al., 1996; Warick, 1994) demonstrating that hard of hearing students in mainstream settings may experience loneliness and isolation has influenced this focus.

Israelite et al. (2002) conducted a qualitative study with hard of hearing participants. These researchers were interested in exploring how school experiences, interactions with peers, and interactions with teachers influenced identity construction. Israelite et al., adopting the identity-as-difference perspective proposed by Woodward (1997), conceptualized that "identity is most clearly defined by difference" (p. 134) and is constructed by oppositions and markings of inclusion or exclusion – insiders and outsiders. Based on this theoretical frame, Israelite and her colleagues found that the participants in their study "constructed their identities based on their position with regard to hearing and Deaf peers, and their differentness from both groups" (p. 144). This research emphasized the importance that the participants placed on "fitting in" and highlighted the benefits of same-status peers [other hard of hearing students] in educational placements. Finally, similar to previous studies examining the experiences of hard of hearing students in mainstreamed settings (e.g., Grushkin, 1997; Leigh, 1999; Stinson et al., 1996; Warick, 1994), Israelite et al's, study emphasized the importance of supportive educational placements. In addition, Israelite et al. demonstrated that experiences in educational settings have implications for how hard of hearing youth construct identity.

A Discussion of My Research in Light of Previous Studies

The next section of this chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the current study in relation to previous studies that have explored hearing loss and identity. Three points are addressed and discussed. First, I discuss some of the ways that the narrative summaries of Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah support the findings of previous scholars who have explored variables that influence identity. Second, I discuss how Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's life

stories, the findings of the current study, challenge and extend findings of previous studies. Third, I discuss some of the ways that employing a collaborative narrative method in the current study has contributed to the research.

The review of the empirical literature demonstrated that previous research (e.g., Bat-Chava, 2000; Leigh et al., 1998; Moschella, 1993; Overstreet, 1999) has examined the relationships of a diverse range of variables on the process of identity formation with deaf and hard of hearing participants. The stories of the three women in the present study point to many of the factors previously identified as influencing the identity of deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Specifically, educational placements, family composition, exposure to Deaf culture, and methods of communication were emphasized in Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's narratives.

Bat-Chava (2000), Foster (1989), Glickman (1993, 1996), Israelite et al. (2002), Roy (1996), Rose (2001), and Stinson et al. (1996) found that educational placements were influential in the process of identity formation. Similarly, educational placements were highlighted as important contexts where Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah navigated identity construction. The narratives of all three participants illustrated how Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's experiences in a mainstream setting with hearing students influenced each participant's feelings about self as a deaf person. Specifically, like Kent (2003), Leigh (1999) and Stinson et al. (1996), the three women's narratives emphasized the importance of supportive educational environments. All three women explained how they experienced barriers in the classroom. For example, in high school the women were expected to learn from films and filmstrips that did not have captioning. Kailyn, Maria and Deborah's stories illustrate that lack of educational supports had implications for how the women went about constructing their identities. Also, the women's narratives support the findings of Israelite et al. (2002) and Stinson et al. (1996), who found that a critical mass of same status peers positively influenced identity. All three women told of an attraction to other deaf and hard of hearing students in their schools (e.g., Deborah, lines 738 – 741). They explained that they experienced a sense of "connection" and belonging with same status peers. As Kailyn explicitly outlined, this "connection" created a sense of "safety" (line 490), influencing how she constructed her identities. It is important to note, however, that the three participants also shared stories where they identified and experienced a sense of belonging with hearing peers

at various times in their narratives. Therefore, the narratives of the three participants offer support of the value of same-status peers; in addition, the three women's narratives highlight the complexities of the concepts of belonging and connection.

Family composition was another factor that emerged as an important influence on identity. Similar to Glickman (1993; 1996), Leigh & Stinson (1991), Leigh et al. (1998), Overstreet (1999), and Rose (2001), the women in the present study emphasized the importance of family on identity. Kailyn's, Maria's and Deborah's narratives illustrate that family culture, where the goal for the deaf individual was integration in the world, influenced how they constructed their identities. In addition, Kailyn, Maria and Deborah all highlighted the audiological status of the members of their family. Being the only deaf member in the family shaped their lived experiences, having an affect on identity. This supports the findings of Leigh et al. (1998) who found that the audiological composition of participants' families had a relationship to the participants' identity.

A third variable that Kailyn's, Maria's and Deborah's narratives highlighted as influencing their identities was contact with and increased exposure to the Deaf community and Deaf culture. This supports the findings of Bat-Chava (2000) and Leigh (1999). All three women were raised in hearing-oriented family and education contexts; however, as young adults they all began experiencing increasing involvement with the Deaf community. The women demonstrated in their life stories how this exposure influenced their transition to constructing culturally Deaf identities.

Finally, Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's life stories emphasized the importance of methods of communication on identity, supporting the findings of Bat-Chava (2000), Finn (1995), and Moschella (1993). For example, all three women's experiences of being raised in an auditory/oral environment influenced their early identification as an oral deaf individual. Furthermore, for all three participants in the present study, methods of communication were metaphors for ways of representing an oral deaf identity and/or a Culturally Deaf identity.

In addition to research investigating factors and variables that influence identities, previous researchers (e.g., Glickman, 1993; Weinberg & Sterritt, 1986) carried out the task of developing measures that classified individuals according to cultural identity categories. For example, the scale developed by Weinberg and Sterritt (1986) classified individuals into three groups: those with a predominant hearing identity (able-bodied identity), those with a

primary deaf identity (disabled identity), and those who identified with both groups (dual identity). The Deaf Identity Development Scale (DIDS) developed by Glickman (1993) distinguished four cultural identities. The four categories are the culturally hearing, the culturally marginal, the immersion identity (which refers to a radical or militant Deaf identity), and the bicultural identity. These scales were innovative, and their use in these studies, and subsequent studies (e.g., Bat-Chava, 2000; Glickman, 1996), contributed important and groundbreaking insights about the various constructed categories. The scales allowed for efforts to describe the various culturally identities and lead to theorizing about possible consequences of the individual identity categories.

The emergence of cultural identity categories (e.g., culturally hearing or hard of hearing identities) within academic discourses on deafness and identity, in conjunction with emerging debates within Deaf communities, and as a part of Deaf politics, which distinguish between 'd'eaf and 'D'eaf identities, however, have contributed to a position within these discourses that promote the idea of stable identity categories that one is either culturally Deaf (e.g., Deaf) or culturally hearing (e.g., deaf or hard of hearing). The findings of the present study challenge the view of stable identity categories. For example, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah all invoked Deaf cultural identities as political markers of identity; however, the narrative summaries demonstrate that all three women constructed multiple identities that contradicted, overlapped, and coexisted. The women's narrative identities were fluid over time and space.

The findings of the present study also extend the findings of Melick (1999), who outlined a developmental model of Deaf cultural identity formation. The narratives of Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah do bear witness to many of the findings described by Melick that individuals develop a Deaf identity by progressing through four stages: being an outsider, encountering and connecting with Deaf people, transitioning from an outsider to an insider, and finally, self-defining as culturally Deaf. For example, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah all shared stories where they positioned themselves as outsiders, where they worked at passing as close to the hearing norm as possible. Then, in young adulthood, all three women experienced a shift when they began to encounter Deaf individuals and connect with Deaf culture. Third, upon responding to the draw to the Deaf community, all three women shared stories of their experiences transitioning from an outsider in the Deaf community to an

insider. Also, the three women's narratives demonstrated that they all self-defined as culturally Deaf. The life stories of Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah correspond to the developmental model devised by Melick; however, this study, situated in a narrative inquiry, assumes a different theoretical lens of identity. Therefore, applying a narrative analysis to the stories of Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah contributes additional insights to previous theorizing about hearing loss and identity.

First, the findings of the present study illustrate that the influence of hearing loss on identity is complex and that identity categories, such as Deaf/deaf, are not stable but rather are fluid, shifting over time and space. In fact, the narrative summaries illustrated that the three women had shifting identities and positionalities. Second, positioned within narrative inquiry, a focus of the present study was on how self is a dynamic process that is socially embedded, and that this process is ongoing. For example, Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's narratives demonstrated that all three women continue to navigate and construct their identities within the sociocultural contexts where they live. At the time of the research interview, the women particularly emphasized that the family, places of employment, and the Deaf community were important present day sociocultural contexts as the women continue to navigate identity construction.

Third, adopting a narrative lens allowed for a critical examination of the cultural tales (cultural discourses) at work in the participants' narratives. The critical reading of culture and relations of power examined how discourses of normalcy, discourses of difference, discourses of passing and Deaf cultural discourses were at work in Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's narratives. I described the prevalence of discourses of normalcy working in a binary relationship with discourses of difference and how this binary relationship operated in such a way that categorized people in terms of their difference from one another (Collins, 1990), where one side of the dichotomy is privileged and the opposite is "othered" (Wendell, 1996). The analysis demonstrated that the participants in this study found alternative discourses in the Deaf community that the participants drew on.

In addition to extending previous researchers' findings about hearing loss and identity, employing a collaborative narrative method to explore deafness and identity contributes valuable insights to the relevant research communities. First, using a collaborative narrative method is an innovative method that to the best of my knowledge has

not been used with deaf participants. The present study has demonstrated the value of this method when working with participants who identify themselves as culturally Deaf. Issues of representation have emerged as significant concerns to many social science researchers (e.g., Arvay, 2001, 2003; Denzin, 1997; Reissman, 1993; Richardson, 1997). These issues are further intensified when one conducts research with participants who communicate in a different language or modality. This is often the case in the field of deafness when social scientists engage in research projects with participants who use various forms of manual communication (e.g., A.S.L.). By adopting a collaborative narrative method with Deaf participants in the present study, I was able to elicit the participants' feedback concerning my interpretations of their interviews. In addition to checking for language issues relating to interpretation, I was further able to consult my participants around the presentation of their lives as narrative summaries. Although issues of representation can never be fully resolved (Reissman, 1993; Richardson, 2000), collaboration in the present study offers an example of an innovative way to address some of the added complexities around representation when interviewing deaf participants.

An additional way that collaboration contributes to research carried out with Deaf participants relates to issues of confidentiality. Previous researchers (e.g., Skelton & Valentine, 2003) have articulated the concern of limits to confidentiality when working with Deaf participants and eliciting personal details. The concern centres on the possibility of readers identifying the identity of a participant because of the size and interconnectedness of the Deaf community. Collaborating with participants allowed me to address this concern in a multiplicity of ways. First, the participants and I worked together to address issues of confidentiality in the presentation of their narrative summaries. We reviewed the names of peoples, cities, and schools in an effort to change identifying information. Second, the participants and I had ongoing discussions of possible limits to confidentiality; therefore, in light of these limits to confidentiality, participants were consulted about the content of their respective narrative summaries to ensure their consent.

Finally, a commitment to narrative research encourages utilizing a narrative form when presenting the findings of a study. In the present study, the findings were presented as narrative summaries, as stories. The presentation of the findings as narrative summaries allowed for a multilayered, textured representation of the complexities, contradictions, and

variability of expressions of self (Hoskins & Arvay, 1999). Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's life stories allowed for multiple, competing, and contradictory identity discourses to emerge in the texts demonstrating that identities are not stable, fixed categories. In the words of Denison (1996), who wrote that a purpose of narrative writing is to "show rather than tell" (p. 352), the presentation of the life stories as narrative summaries *showed* the findings of the present study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY,

IMPLICATIONS OF A COLLABORATIVE NARRATIVE METHOD, AND

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Part One – Suggestions From the Findings of the Present Study

This study focused on the life stories of three women with a prelingual hearing loss who were raised orally and now as adults identify themselves as culturally Deaf. These stories are not intended to speak for all deaf people. Nor, are the stories said to speak for Deaf women who, like the three participants, were raised in hearing-oriented environments and now identify as culturally Deaf. Having stated this, it may be that others who read this study share similar experiences as Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah, and it may be that others resonate with some or much of the women's narratives. Furthermore, it may be that readers may share some, parts, or all of my interpretations of the readings across the three women's stories. Having outlined the limits of drawing implications from the findings of the present study, it is my belief that this research offers valuable resources for professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families. I also believe that the findings provide insights that may be of value to families of deaf and hard of hearing children. In this section, I outline some of the possible suggestions for professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing children and their families. I specifically focus the discussion on educators, social workers and mental health counselors, and medical professionals. I also include a discussion of some of the ways the findings may be useful for families of deaf and hard of hearing children.

Suggestions for Educators

Education plays a significant role in the lives of deaf and hard of hearing children. In fact, management of hearing loss has predominantly been the domain of educators working alongside of parents. Not surprisingly then, much of the empirical research in the area of deafness has focused on examining educational philosophies, including methods of communication and educational placements. Increasingly, as researchers have become interested in the relationship between hearing loss and identity, they (e.g., Bat-Chava, 2000; Israelite et al., 2002; Kent, 2003; Leigh, 1999; Rose, 2001; Roy, 1996) have begun to

examine the influence of educational placements on identity, demonstrating that educational experiences are a factor in the development and/or construction of identity. Through the narratives of Kailyn, Maria and Deborah, this study also highlights the significance of education experiences in the construction of identities. The women's narratives are resources generating implications for educational professionals.

One theme repeatedly surfacing in the stories of educational experiences related to issues of belonging. All three women began their kindergarten in hearing schools where other oral deaf children attended. Supporting research (e.g., Israelite et al., 2002; Stinson & Leigh, 1995) that showed that deaf students were drawn to "same-status peers" – other deaf students – in educational placements, Kailyn, Maria and Deborah spoke of their connection with deaf peers and their desire to socialize with other deaf children in their schools. They described experiences of feeling a sense of belonging when they were with same-status peers. However, this issue of belonging and not belonging was complex. For example, Kailyn clearly articulated her experience of living "between worlds" where she did not belong with the hearing students or the deaf students at her school. Later, however, when she transferred to a hearing high school for grade 12, Kailyn shared that she felt she had arrived "home" and spoke of her connection and sense of belonging with her fellow hearing peers. Maria's and Deborah's stories contained narratives of close friendships with hearing neighbours and schoolmates. These stories co-existed with the participants' expressions of connection with same-status peers. Their narratives, therefore, speak to the complexities of deaf and hard of hearing children in educational settings where a child may sometimes belong with hearing peers, sometimes belong with hard of hearing peers, and sometimes belong with deaf peers (personal communication J. Jamieson, March 29, 2004). However, Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's stories of connection and belonging with same-status peers support the position of some

researchers (e.g., Carver & Sam, 2000; Israelite et al., 2002; Schildroth & Hotto, 1995) who have advocated for educational placements where there is a "critical mass" of deaf peers. Like the findings of Foster (1989) and Israelite et al. (2002), Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's stories of connection and belonging with same status peers highlighted the social-emotional benefits of this kind of connection. Connections with deaf peers helped ameliorate the marginalizing effects of feeling different and the possible internalization of "not-

belonging" (Israelite et al., 2002). Therefore, having a "critical mass" of deaf peers provides deaf and hard of hearing students a choice to socialize with their deaf peers or hearing peers, or both. Unfortunately, having a group of deaf children together in the same educational setting is not always possible. For example, in rural settings there may not be a population of deaf children to bring together in the same placement. The challenge then becomes how to try and create contexts where deaf and hard of hearing children who are in isolated areas can benefit from interaction with same-status peers. Currently, in British Columbia, the Services for Family and Community Development (SFCD), under the Provincial Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, provides outreach services to families with deaf and hard of hearing children for creative contexts where children and their families can come together to connect and socialize with one another. Other examples include itinerant teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing who find opportunities and means to bring children in outlying communities together in some capacity, such as a monthly field trip.

Another theme that emerged from the women's narratives centred on issues of accessibility. A phrase that was repeated by all three women in reference to their educational experiences was "no supports." They shared stories of surviving in spite of barriers and lack of supports in their educational placements. For example, Maria and Deborah told of teachers who used films in class with no closed captioning. Kailyn shared that she was unable to take French in Grade 12 because the oral French component was inaccessible to her and it was assumed that there wasn't an alternative solution to this barrier. Furthermore, in addition to barriers affecting their classroom learning, accessibility issues also affected their social experiences, particularly in high school. Similar to the findings of Charlson, Strong, and Gold (1992), who found that deaf students in their study experienced isolation from peers and teachers and frequently lacked support services needed in order to participate in extracurricular activities, Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah shared stories of isolation from hearing peers and commented on the missed social opportunities resulting from both isolation and lack of support.

Deborah shared a positive story relating to access when she spoke of a high school teacher who structured the classroom seating in a U-shape. Deborah explained how this environmental consideration enhanced her ability to follow classroom discussions, improving accessibility issues. This story supports the writing of Carver and Sam (2000), who

emphasized the importance of environmental factors in educational placements in addressing access issues. For example, Carver and Sam emphasized the importance of technological devices in the classroom to enhance access, such as closed captioning machines for videos, flashing lights for school bells, seating arrangements that facilitate visual communication (e.g., round tables, U-shaped seating), proper lighting for visual clarity, and acoustic considerations. Some of the stories that Kailyn, Maria and Deborah shared with respect to issues of access may reflect the historical time of deaf education when the three women were in school. However, regardless of the historical context, their stories continue as reminders of the importance of accessibility. Similar to discussions of Foster (1989) and Israelite et al. (2002), Kailyn's, Maria's and Deborah's narratives emphasize the importance of classroom environments that support meaningful interaction among peers, foster a sense of belonging and address issues of access.

One important person in facilitating an accessible and inclusive environment is the educator. As was discussed in Chapter Five, Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's stories exposed the prominence of discourses of normalcy and discourses of difference at work in the cultural practices of the education setting. In light of this, it follows that educational professionals can intervene to counter the influence of these discourses and provide alternative stories. One important response is a commitment by educators to self-reflexivity about how these taken-for-granted discourses are at work shaping their personal values and beliefs, and therefore, influencing their educational practices. Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah all conveyed their perception that at least some of the educators they encountered embraced a paternalistic view of them as students, where there were lowered expectations about their abilities and potential. This highlights the importance of educators adopting an empowering stance where the deaf child's abilities and potential are nurtured. Beyond self-reflexivity, educators can also develop interventions to counter the pervasiveness of discourses of normalcy and discourses of difference. As previously discussed, the normalcy/difference binary promotes the categorization of individuals as "normal" and, therefore, privileged, or as "different/abnormal" and, therefore, marginalized. Kailyn, Maria and Deborah's narratives demonstrate that alternative ways of understanding difference are possible. All three women discovered the alternative language practices of Deaf cultural discourses that they incorporated into how they made meaning of living with a hearing loss. Educators can

develop and implement activities that promote a valuing of diversity where difference is constructed as contributing valuable learning about diversity. Examples may include showing videos which feature Deaf characters in addition to other aspects of human diversity (e.g., cultural and ethnic diversity, diversity of family composition). Activities such as this, when used in an educational capacity, can promote alternative discourses shaping the cultural practices within educational settings.

In conclusion, insights gleaned from Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah's narratives offer suggestions for educators and their practices. The narratives emphasize the importance of an ongoing commitment to alleviating barriers and addressing issues of access. The stories also provide an appeal to educators to engage in deconstructive practices where the authority and marginalizing effects of the normal/difference binary at work in educational settings is countered and new ways of understanding difference are promulgated.

Educational professionals are not the only ones who could benefit from the reminder to explore how privileged discourses such as the normalcy/difference binary work to shape values and beliefs, having implications for our cultural practices. The next section outlines some suggestions for social workers and mental health counsellors working with deaf children and their families.

Suggestions for Social Workers

The findings of this study provide resources for social workers and other mental health professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing children and their families. Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah's stories demonstrate how the three women perceived the influence of hearing loss on how they constructed their identities. The narrative summaries show that this process was complex, textured, and multilayered. In support of the work by Luey and Glass (1995), the findings of the present study highlight the importance of social workers and mental health professionals involved in assessing and serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals, to be attuned to the complex and subtle ways that hearing loss can affect identity and relationships. In the words of Maria when she spoke of her interactions with a mental health counsellor: "The point is you have to be sensitive to hard of hearing people" (Maria, lines 696 – 697). Individuals who have a hearing loss make many "self-defining" choices, including decisions about communication methods, language, and social, cultural and political allegiances (Luey & Glass). And as the stories of Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah

show these choices are not static or stable. They are fluid and may coexist, compete, contradict, and overlap.

Additional suggestions arising from the findings of the present study for social workers relate to the influence of the normalcy/difference binary in the lives of the three participants. The narratives of Kailyn, Maria and Deborah demonstrate that the discourses of normalcy and difference had implications for how the participants constructed their identities. Furthermore, the narratives exposed how the privileged and unexamined authority of these discourses had ramifications for the cultural and institutional practices in the contexts where the three women navigated identity construction. Hearing loss was often construed as abnormal and this difference was ascribed a negative value, resulting in a process where the women experienced oppression. Therefore, social work, as a profession committed to principles of diversity and social justice (Chappell, 2001), should be concerned with deconstructing the normalcy/difference binary and its influence at micro, mezzo, and macro levels of society.

A first step in this process would involve an ongoing commitment to self-awareness, examining how the normalcy/difference binary is at work in our values, beliefs and social work practice. Centring the experiences of the Deaf women in this study illuminated how the unnamed discourses of normalcy and difference construct some as privileged – e.g., hearing/normal – and some as different/other. As McIntosh (2003) and Collins (1990) have maintained, a valuing of diversity necessitates an examination of privileges: e.g., class, white, male, heterosexual, and in light of this study, able-bodied privileges. However, as Lee (2001) promotes, we must go farther than our personal or professional self-reflection to developing social work practice that aims to empower and dismantle inequalities. "We need action" (p. 17), and this action must occur at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. For example, in clinical contexts social workers can facilitate an examination of discourses of normalcy and their possible influence on identity construction. New ways of storying difference can be explored, expanding the range of discourses that individuals can draw upon when constructing identities. An example of action at the mezzo level may be targeting training and education curriculums for social workers and other professionals working with deaf or hard of hearing individuals and their families. Specifically, an aim of this kind of intervention would be to raise awareness of the examination of the discourses of normalcy and difference through

changes in and/or additions to curriculum. Finally, an example of a possible intervention at the macro level, may involve social workers working with community groups (e.g., the B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities) who are creating ways to uncouple and deconstruct the normalcy/difference binary.

Suggestions for Medical Professionals

As was discussed in Chapter Two, "in most circumstances, parents consult their family doctor about concerns they have regarding their child's hearing. After initial consultation, parents are often referred to an audiologist or an ear, nose, and throat doctor who will assess the child's hearing" (p. 17). In fact, Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's narratives indicated that family doctors played important early roles in the diagnosis stories. Thus, the three women's narratives point to possible suggestions for medical professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families.

The narratives speak most prominently to the early role of doctors in the three women's stories of diagnosis. The stories of diagnosis support the position of professionals working in the field of deafness who emphasize the importance of early diagnosis and referral to early intervention programs. In fact, increasingly, professionals are advocating for universal newborn screening of hearing loss in order to prevent delays in diagnosis, such as was the case in Maria's narrative. An increasing movement toward establishing universal newborn screening for hearing loss will influence the role that doctors play in the process of diagnosis. However, because parents rely on family doctors for guidance and information about medical issues, family doctors may still play a role in families where there are deaf and hard of hearing children. Presently, there are guidelines in place to assist family doctors with the process of diagnosis and referral. However, the implementation of these guidelines may vary depending on whether the doctor follows a biomedical and/or cultural model. Thus, a suggestion for the medical profession would be to ensure that educational curriculum for family doctors includes exposure to the diversities and complexities of living with a hearing loss. This increased awareness should include an exploration of the competing ways that hearing loss can be constructed and the implications of these constructions.

Introduction to these ideas may assist family doctors in supporting families through the process of diagnosis and referral. As was discussed in chapter two, frequently a diagnosis of hearing loss is traumatic and unexpected for hearing parents (Johnson et al., 1991). Thus,

doctors need to be sensitive to the emotional process that parents may go through upon learning of their child's hearing loss. With their knowledge of the complexities of hearing loss, doctors can help encourage families to see that there are different ways of understanding deafness and many possible ways of intervening. The increased awareness about deafness will place doctors in a better position to encourage families to explore all the options available to them and their child. Doctors will be informed of the importance of specialized support services for parents who confront confusing and difficult decisions related to their child's hearing loss.

Finally, family doctors continue playing roles throughout deaf and hard of hearing individuals' life span. For example, Kailyn spoke of a medical issue that she encountered just prior to graduation. Deborah and her husband were working closely with medical professionals around her husband's chronic illness. The anticipated likelihood that doctors will have a role in families where there are deaf and hard of hearing children and/or adults suggests that awareness of the diversities and complexities associated with living with a hearing loss continues to be important information for family medicine.

Insights for Families with Deaf or Hard of Hearing Children

In this section, I discuss some possible implications of this research for parents of deaf and hard of hearing children. Parents of deaf and hard of hearing children frequently know very little about deafness prior to learning that their child has a hearing loss (Johnson et al., 1989). In addition, Kailyn's, Maria's and Deborah's stories point to the importance of the family as a key socio-emotional context where the women engaged in the ongoing negotiation of identity. Thus, the life-stories of Kailyn, Maria, and Deborah are potential resources providing parents with knowledge and insights about the experiences of living in the world as a Deaf woman. As the participants shared their unique selves, struggles, and triumphs, their stories may be a source of wisdom for parents to learn about deafness.

Part Two – Implications of a Collaborative Narrative Method

Reflecting on the research process, I identified a number of methodological implications. The next section explores the benefits and limitations of employing a collaborative narrative method with Deaf participants. First, I discuss how using a collaborative narrative method encouraged the implementation of the concepts of diversity

and inclusion in my research practices. Second, I discuss some of the limitations of the present study that have implications for future research endeavours.

A Collaborative Narrative Method and the Principles of Diversity and Inclusion

As a feminist social worker committed to the principles of diversity and inclusion, a major benefit of a collaborative narrative method was the inherent potential to implement these concepts in my research practices. With respect to the principle of diversity, using a collaborative narrative method allowed me to centre the experiences of the Deaf women who participated in my study, de-centring the unmarked category of hearing. As scholars (e.g., Davis, 1997; Wendell, 1996) within disability studies contend, theorizing about disability historically has not had the visibility of studies about race, class, or gender (Davis, 1997). This study, with its focus on the life stories of three Deaf women, offers a critical space to learn about diversity from the experiences of the three Deaf women. Kailyn's, Maria's, and Deborah's life stories become sources of knowledge and expressions of valuable ways of being. Their stories help to expand the range of understanding of living in our society as a Deaf woman (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Furthermore, utilizing a collaborative narrative method involved an examination of how cultural tales were at work in the stories the three women shared. This analysis drew attention to the positive re-storying influences that alternative language practices (e.g., Deaf cultural discourses) can have, promoting a valuing of human differences. The analysis also included a critical examination of unexamined and unnamed categories, de-centring privileges. Increasingly, scholars (e.g., Bailey, 1999; Cuomo & Hall, 1999; Frankenberg, 1997; McIntosh, 2003) exploring racialized, gendered inequalities and experiences of marginalization have advocated for a critical examination of privilege, arguing that relations of power, where some are categorized and constructed as "Other" (Collins, 1990), will not be transformed unless privilege is challenged and deconstructed. Thus, in addition to promoting an exploration of experiences of diversity, a collaborative narrative method has allowed for an examination of privilege. By exploring the binary partnership of discourses of normalcy and discourses of difference, its privileged and taken-for-granted authority that constructs hearing as normal and deaf as abnormal, or 'Other,' was deconstructed.

With respect to implementing the principle of inclusion in my research practices, the narrative method that I utilized encouraged collaboration with my participants. Because of

feasibility issues, I diverged from the level of collaboration proposed by Arvay (1999, 2002, 2003). However, I did include my participants to the extent that they were asked to review the transcript of their interview and the initial analysis of their narrative summaries. In addition to providing important member checks, this collaboration allowed me to elicit their input with respect to how the participants' life stories were to be represented.

There were numerous benefits to the participants' inclusion in the process of analysis. One benefit, which was simultaneously a limitation of this research, involved the value of consulting participants about their transcripts and narrative summaries. Involving participants to this degree requires increased time and energy for both the researcher and participants. However, the benefits of doing so outweighed the costs.

A limitation of this research had to do with the issues of representation. As discussed previously, issues of representation were intensified in this study, due to the participants' preference to communicate using visual communication. Participants communicated using American Sign Language, but periodically code-switched to Pidgin Signed English. Interpreting visual language into a spoken one is bound to lose some of the complexities, emotions, and meanings of the signed communication (Skelton & Valentine, 2003). This working between two languages added to already existing issues of representation. However, collaborating with the participants allowed me to perform member checks around the content of the transcripts and narrative summaries. In addition, as a culturally hearing researcher, I was able to consult participants about possible cultural metaphors that may be unfamiliar to me, given my hearing identity.

Another benefit of using a collaborative narrative method in this study involved issues related to confidentiality and informed consent. First, there were potential limits and concerns with respect to confidentiality. Deaf communities are relatively small numerically; therefore, some researchers (e.g., Foster, 1989; Skelton & Valentine, 2003) have highlighted the importance of preserving participants' privacy and confidentiality as a key research issue. Given that I was obtaining participants' life-stories and representing my findings as narrative summaries of the participants' life-stories, there were potential limits to confidentiality. In an effort to address these potential limits to confidentiality, I openly discussed these issues with potential participants prior to the individuals consenting to participate. In addition, collaborating with participants during the process of analysis, specifically with respect to the

representation of the life stories in narrative form, allowed me to address issues of confidentiality and informed consent throughout the process of analysis. Participants were asked for their feedback with respect to issues of confidentiality and they all consented to the final writing of their story as it appears in this dissertation.

Part Three – Limitations of the Present Study and Implications for Future Research

The final section presents some ideas regarding implications for future research. I begin by elaborating on two methodological limitations of my study and I discuss the implications of these limitations for future researchers. Next, I discuss possible future research questions that I would like to follow up on as I continue to explore the concepts of hearing loss and identity from a narrative perspective.

One methodological limitation of the present research is related to the interview guide that I selected for my study. The interview guide [Appendix D] used in this study asked participants to think of their lives as books and divide their lives into chapters. Thus, as is common in our sociocultural practices, the women constructed chronological narratives, beginning with early life and ending with present issues. The sequential unfolding of talk of all three women influenced the representation of findings in my study, both the narrative summaries and the discourse analysis. The narrative summaries and the discourse analysis unfold chronologically. From a narrative view of identities, these representations may be problematic because of the possibility of misinterpreting the stories and seeing the stories as depicting individuals who move through progressive, developmental stages. Thus, a possibility for future research exploring hearing loss and narrative identities is to find an interview guide that would shift life stories away from a linear progression that seem to suggest a developmental progressive storyline.

A second methodological limitation of the present study emerged from my decision not to collaborate with my participants in my interpretations of their stories. I made this decision for pragmatic reasons, specifically issues relating to feasibility and time. However, as previously discussed, the women's responses to my analysis of their stories are missing in this dissertation. It is unknown how they would respond to my interpretations. As a feminist researcher concerned with issues of representation, authority, and voice, this omission is a limitation of the present study. In light of this limitation, I encourage subsequent researchers

employing a collaborative narrative method (Arvay, 1999, 2002, 2003) to endeavour to collaborate with their participants in the scope that Arvay outlined.

This second methodological limitation relates to one of my directions for future research. Because I did not consult my participants regarding my interpretations of the findings, one of my future research plans involves taking the findings and interpretations back to the participants if they are willing and interested, and with ethical approval. I believe that carrying out this additional piece of research will add to the findings of the present study, providing an additional resource to draw upon as I engage in the process of writing articles about this study for publication.

Another direction for future research involves exploring the strengths and limitations of collaborative research. As a hearing researcher interviewing Deaf participants, I found that collaboration with the participants was invaluable. I was able to consult participants about my interpretations of their interviews from sign to printed English. In addition, I was able to clarify questions that arose as a result of conducting cross-cultural research. Finally, I was able to collaborate with each woman regarding how her life story was presented. Thus, a remaining question for me is how did the women perceive their participation in the present study? I believe that a study following up on the women's experiences of being involved in a collaborative study would provide valuable insights about collaborative methods.

Finally, a question for future exploration emerged as I conducted the present study. For the purposes of the current research I specifically was guided by my research question exploring how the women perceived the influence of hearing loss on identity. Drawing on a poststructural emphasis on discourses I examined four cultural discourses that were at work in the women's narratives. They were discourses of normalcy, discourses of difference, discourses of passing and Deaf cultural discourses. As I consulted my journal throughout the research process and in discussions with my research committee, an exciting direction for future exploration surfaced. The topic of the future study is examining the relationship between the methods of communication used by the participants in the present study and their identity discourses. For example, when did the women speak? When did the women sign? When did the women use American Sign Language? Were they switching between hearing and deaf ways of communicating when they were talking about hearing/deaf

tensions? I believe exploring these questions as they relate to my data will contribute valuable insights about discourse analysis and theorizing about identity.

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APPENDIX A

Thursday, January 9, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

   I am a doctoral student at the University of British Columbia in the Individual Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program. For my dissertation I am exploring how three Deaf women understand the influence of hearing loss in their life experiences. I will do this by gathering life stories from three Deaf women. Drawing on the personal wisdom of Deaf women, this research will provide valuable insights about the experiences of living as a deaf woman. It is titled **Three Deaf Women's Narratives of Identity**.

   I believe these findings will be beneficial to families with deaf and hard of hearing children, and the professionals who serve them. Furthermore, I believe that exploring one's own story with respect to the influence of hearing loss on identity can elicit valuable insights for the individual participants in this study. I am asking you to consider participating in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time with no consequence to yourself.

   Individuals who are interested in participating in this study will be asked to commit to four separate meetings. The first meeting will be an initial interview where I will explain in detail my research and answer any of your questions concerning the research. If it is agreed that you will participate, the second interview will involve sharing your life story with me. The interview will follow a conversational format. I will ask you questions to facilitate the process. I anticipate that this interview will take approximately three hours. The purpose of the third interview will be to review the transcript of the interview to ensure that the transcription represents what you wanted to share with me. Finally, I would like to meet with you to review my initial findings and obtain feedback to ensure that the findings reflect your experiences. In total, I expect the four interviews to take approximately seven to ten hours of your time.

   All meetings will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient for you. If you incur costs associated with transportation for research meetings, you will be reimbursed. Meetings will be conducted in your preferred method of

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APPENDIX B

Wednesday, January 29, 2003

Dear < name of respondent >,

Thank you so much for offering to participate in my research. I had a wonderful response from many Deaf women which was really great. Because of the great response I had to carefully decide who to approach about committing to the study. I did this by going back to my original research proposal. By doing this I was reminded of some important criteria that I needed to consider for potential participants. The first was that I had proposed to interview women who were prelingually deaf. The second issue that came up was that I defined "being raised orally" as without sign language in both the family and school settings.

<only for participants I worked with because they might be identifiable> Finally, I have decided that I wouldn't interview individuals who I worked with.

Guided by these issues I will not be asking you to participate. I do, however, want to thank you so much for your interest and willingness to be a part of my study. I was very fortunate to have responses from so many enthusiastic and willing women.

Thanks so much for your willingness!

Sincerely,

Rachelle Hole

Language. All documents and videotapes will be identified by a code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. No one other than myself, Ms. Hole, her advisor (Dr. Paule McNicoll), and Ms. Hole's research methodologist (Dr. Marla Arvay) will have access to the transcribed interviews. Because of the nature of this research (life histories) and the small size of the local Deaf community I understand that there may be limits to the level of confidentiality (e.g. someone reading the narrative summary of my life history may recognize aspects of my story). These limits to confidentiality have been discussed with me. I understand that I will have input regarding concerns of confidentiality in the writing up of my story. I also have been given a choice as to whether I prefer to use my own name in the reporting of these findings or a pseudonym.

The amount of time required of me as a participant over the next six weeks will be between six and ten hours for all interviews. I understand that I will be asked to keep a record of commuting expenses (e.g., parking, bus fare) and will be reimbursed if I incur any transportation costs as a result of participating in this study. I will receive a thank you gift – a gift certificate from a bookstore – in appreciation of my time and input to this research at the completion of this study.

My participation is strictly voluntary. I may refuse to participate in this study, or at any time after agreeing to participate in it, I may withdraw from the project without any consequence to myself.

I have been informed that the information collected in this study will be used to complete Ms. Hole's doctoral dissertation. Furthermore, the research may be published and/or presented at a conference. No identifying information will be included in these works that I have not consented to. Finally, dissertations at the University of British Columbia become public property of the university and are kept in the library system. A copy of the written report will be made available to me if I desire.

If I have any questions or require any information that is not provided in this consent form, Ms. Hole or her advisor, Dr. McNicoll, will be pleased to provide further information to be sure that I fully understand this project and what I am being asked to do. Ms. Hole and Dr. McNicoll can be reached by the telephone voice numbers provided on the first page of this consent form or by email if I prefer. If I choose to meet with Dr. McNicoll to discuss any questions or concerns I have, and I prefer to communicate using American Sign Language, a certified sign language interpreter will be hired at no cost to myself.

If I have any concerns about my treatment or my rights as a research participant I may contact the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia at 604-822-8598.

In signing below I acknowledge that:

1) A copy of the consent form has been given to me; and

2) I have read it and received a thorough explanation of the project; and

3) I, _____, consent to participate in the research project described above; and,

4) I prefer the name, _____ (pseudonym or real name), in the reporting of the findings in this study.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

Task I:

Every person's life can be written as a book. I would like you to think about your life now as if you were writing a book. First, think about the chapters of this book. I have here a page [sheet of paper with two columns] to help you in this task. Write down the years on the first column, for example what ages were you during chapter one. Indicate it here on the paper. Then go on to the next chapters and put down the age that each one begins and ends for you. Go on until you reach your present age. You can use any number of chapters or stages that you find suitable to your own life.

Task II:

Now think about the title you would give each one of these chapters and write this title in the next column. I will be asking you several questions about each one of the stages you proposed.

Task III: [A general descriptive report of each stage]

1) Tell me about a significant episode or memory that you remember about this stage.
2) Are there other significant stories that stand out for you about this stage?
3) What kind of person were you during this stage?
4) Who were the significant people for you during this stage and why?
5) What is your reason for choosing to terminate this stage when you did?

Task IV:

When the entire outline is worked through, final topics will be introduced relating specifically to the research question. Specifically if participants have not raised the issue of hearing loss the researcher will explore what the significance of hearing loss was for the participant when reflecting on the identified stages?