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MOTHER FATHER DEAF:
IDENTITY ON THE MARGINS OF CULTURE

by

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For Mom, who encouraged me to take risks.

For Dad, who warned me not to run out of gas.

Preface

One of Michael's first memories is a hot summer day, standing outside the gate of their small home in Akron, Ohio. It was 1924; Michael was four years old. His father, a newly arrived immigrant from Ukraine, yelled from the porch to close the gate. Michael ignored his father. His father yelled again, but Michael kept staring out the open gate. His father, Cossack eyes fiery with anger, grabbed him from behind and dragged him into the house. His older sister and brother could hear the sounds of their father whipping Michael.

A few days later, the source of Michael's disobedience was discovered. Michael never heard his father's voice calling from the porch. Michael was deaf. Born hearing and never apparently sick, some unknown thief had stolen him from the world of sound. The change, invisible and profound, had not been noticed until then. Michael remembers his father grabbing him once again, but this time clutching him to his chest and rocking him quietly. It was the only time he ever saw his father cry.

Michael is now 72. He is my father.

Although I have normal hearing, both of my parents are profoundly deaf. This dissertation explores the lives of other people like myself -- hearing children of deaf parents. I begin with my father's story because it is part of my family history. It is one of the pieces that I know about a hearing grandfather long dead, and about my father as a young boy. Three generations -- my grandparents, my parents, and myself -- represent a twist in our family mobius strip: Hearing into Deaf into Hearing. Like most of the families within this dissertation, both grandparents and grandchildren are hearing -- yet, somehow different from each other.

The title of this dissertation -- <u>Mother Father Deaf</u>[1] -- is a commonly-used identifier for children of deaf parents within the Deaf community. Although used for both hearing and deaf children, 'mother father deaf' remains a life-long identifier for hearing children. Deaf children of deaf parents become known in the Deaf community in their own right as deaf persons. However, for hearing children and adult children of deaf parents, this phrase legitimizes their connection to an often separate and impermeable land. It is how many deaf people explain the curious presence of a hearing person in their exclusively deaf world: "Oh, you know him...mother father deaf." By the knowing responses of other deaf people, hearing children recognize their acceptance

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[1] 'Mother father deaf' is the verbatim English equivalent of three signs which, depending on context and accompanying facial expressions, can be variously translated -- such as, "My mother and father are deaf" or "Are her mother and father deaf?" Yet, the English phrase 'mother father deaf' is often recognizable even among those who use American Sign Language (ASL). Because of the diverse possible language orientations of deaf people and their hearing children, this signed identifier is often accompanied by mouthed or spoken words. This provides a wide catchment between those who exclusively use ASL and those who use only spoken English.

within the Deaf community.

During my dissertation work, I travelled to Israel. The political climate was particularly tense and I was foolishly wandering alone about the streets of a nearly deserted Jerusalem. Unbeknownst to me, tourists had been warned off the streets. I could feel piercing eyes watching me behind closed shutters. I nervously scanned the streets, and saw a group of ten tourists gathered in front of one of the Stations of the Cross. What caught my eye was that they were signing. They were deaf. I immediately moved over towards them. They were a group of German deaf tourists. Although Sign Language is not universal, we were able to communicate. Almost immediately, they wanted to know how I knew sign language. "Mother father deaf," I explained. They all nodded their heads and smiled. One woman came over to me and put her arm around me. "Same us," she nodded as she pulled me into their group.

Acknowledgements

It is not possible to do something of this magnitude or this depth of heart without the support of others. In the Deaf world, you not only thank with words. You show your feelings with a bear-hugging embrace.

I had many doubts about whether these stories should be told. Like most graduate students, I often wondered why I was doing this at all. Joan Ablon pushed me on. Joan sensed my

need for encouragement. She convinced me that what I was doing was important -- important not just in an academic sense, but important in a human sense. Joan is my mentor and friend who encouraged my work through her belief in me. She challenged me to pursue the convictions that I often knew in my heart but sometimes struggled to convey. As a teacher, a researcher and a writer, Joan has been a tireless crusader. I can only hope to emulate her concern for the dignity and humanity in all people.

One day during the middle of my fieldwork, I sat scrunched up in a chair in Gay Becker's office. Exasperated, bewildered and fatigued, I was trying to explain what this research was like and I signed to her ['mirror']. I was thinking of a sentence I had written in my diary the night before: How long can you stare in the mirror before you go crazy? And Gay nodded in agreement: "Yes...Yes, it's that close." I realized that in signing to her, I was holding up my open 'mirror' hand not at arms length (as it is usually placed) but pressed up against my face. It was this close. Gay has written about the deaf and helped me bridge the gap I sometimes feel when trying to go between two worlds. She shares a knowledge of our history and our culture. I owe Gay many thanks for her hours of listening and suggesting.

I remember Carol Stack's excitement when I first explained my research to her. She quickly led me out into the hallways announcing to students and faculty the subject of my dissertation. Carol's writings and insights on the family and on the narrative self have been a treasured resource. And, from Carol I learned an important lesson: to go with rather than against my familiarity with the subject at hand.

Early on, I asked Tim for help -- and I almost never ask for help. I remember telling him my fieldwork would take me to the farthest edge of the universe: I was going home. Tim provided me with refuge from the immersion. He took me camping or off to a Sunday flea market. As a middle-aged student, I often couldn't afford to go out for a hamburger or see a movie, and Tim would say, "Don't worry, my treat." We gardened and obsessed about which tree would we plant in our small urban backyard. We would laugh in the mornings over the latest Doonesbury and reminisce about our day's adventures until late at night.

One of the supreme benefits of a dual campus dissertation program has been the wide range of scholarship available to me on the San Francisco and the Berkeley campuses. It has been an honor to work with and learn from the writings, the teachings and the suggestions of these faculty members and colleagues: Jim Billings, Judith Barker, Margaret Clark, George DeVos, Chris Hatcher, Linda Mitteness, Aiwa Ong and Nancy Scheper-Hughes. I am also indebted to two wonderful department secretaries -- Priscilla Ednalgan and Effie Meredith -- who provided on-going ballast in the daily routines of University life.

Through many days, months and years of my dogged questions, my friends patiently put up with my persistent ramblings and excited inquiries: Did this ever happen in your family? Why do you think this happened? What do you think of that? I am especially grateful to those who overlooked occasions of my lax friendship and gave me much needed support and encouragement. Judith, Polly, Harry, Peter, Jill, Erica, Peggy, Jim, Karen, Birdie, Linda, Marguerite, David, Ruth and many others contributed greatly to this endeavor and to my personal well-being.

Finally, I have such heartfelt gratitude and respect for my informants. These women and men have literally made this long journey possible -- through their generosity in time, meals, lodging and moral support. They have been the backbone and the soul of my research. These informants have taken risks by sharing their history and their sense of themselves. We rarely allow others to watch us because it is an uncomfortably familiar place. Along with our parents, we were often stared at because of our difference. We are guarded with our family stories because it is too easy to stand apart, to judge and to misunderstand. Only within our families are we free to acknowledge and to share our difference. More recently we have begun to explore not merely the difference that we share with our parents, but how we are different from them. During the five years I worked on this project, I witnessed a tremendous burgeoning of creative activity by those with deaf parents: novels, plays, short stories, art, music. National and international conferences developed from informal meetings and sporadic newsletters. I am priviledged to be able to share this story and this history with them.

ABSTRACT

PRESTON, PAUL M. (UCSF) MOTHER FATHER DEAF: IDENTITY ON THE MARGINS OF CULTURE.

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of adult hearing children of deaf parents. Almost 90% of the children born to life-long profoundly deaf parents are hearing. Within this extraordinary family setting, hearing children of deaf parents are exposed to and interact with two differing cultural, social and linguistic systems: that of their deaf parents and the Deaf community, and that of hearing peers and adults. Previous research on this population has largely focused on linguistic competency among infants and young children. The few studies on adult hearing children of deaf parents have been limited to individual case studies and itemized surveys. A more broadly-based study of the long term cultural and psychosocial effects of this heritage has remained unexplored in the research.

This study is based on interviews and life histories of 150 adult hearing children of deaf parents throughout the United States. Additional data was taken from observations at local, state and national meetings of CODA (Children of Deaf Adults). Using a phenomenological approach, this ethnography takes its primary directive from the narratives and interpretations given by informants. Interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed, and all data was analyzed and coded using data-base systems developed for this project.

In addition to providing heretofore unavailable historical and demographic data on this population, this study challenges commonly-held theoretical and popular assumptions about language and family. This study provides important insights into the parameters and experiences of Deaf culture as it contrasts and conflicts with Hearing culture. It examines processes of assimilation and cultural affiliation among a population whose lives incorporate the paradox of being culturally 'deaf' yet functionally hearing. Finally, these findings lead to an exploration of adult identity which is shown to depend on culturally constructed beliefs about parents, children and families.

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INTRODUCTION

In a small town cafe, Peter[1] sat across the table and paused after I asked him a final question: "So did having deaf parents make any difference?" In a quiet and deliberate voice, he started:

> I was so fortunate. You know, I saw a side of life that most people never see. I learned things that even today most of my friends still don't know. My life is just so much richer because my parents were deaf. In spite of all the hardships they had to endure, they kept going. Kept on. And, most of all, they loved each other, and they loved me. What more can you ask for?

Months later, I waited impatiently in a classroom. I had never met Doreen before she stomped into her interview.

> Boy! I can't wait to get this stuff off my chest! I've been holding onto all this negative bullshit for over thirty years! "Interpret what they're saying." "Sign this for me." "Don't listen to the radio, I can't hear it!" Yes, it's too bad you can't hear, but is it my fault I can? I'm not deaf. I'm hearing!

Thousands of miles from either Peter or Doreen, I sat in Angelique's kitchen. While her mother watched television in the next room, Angelique explained what it was like to have her mother live with her. Then she stopped and looked at me:

> You know, these frustrations are just part of human life. It doesn't really make that much difference that my mother is deaf. A lot of it is just human nature, human interaction. My mother is deaf, but she's also my mother.

Peter, Doreen and Angelique represent a brief spectrum of

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[1] All names have been changed and many identifying characteristics have been minimized in order to protect anonymity.

people interviewed for this book. They illustrate the range of emotional and reasoned responses to the overarching question asked of these informants: How has deaf parents made a difference in who you are today? Even now, reading through these interviews, I am reminded of a woman who spoke to me briefly about my research. She sought me out and confided that she knew two women who had deaf parents. Then she shook her head. "They're nothing alike! I just don't see any connection between the two." Her voice had a tone of exasperation. "Maybe you'll find something I don't see."

Each of us is a kaleidoscope of memories, routines and aspirations. We define and understand ourselves through often imperceptible lenses of society and culture. This dissertation examines the relationship between identity and family. Who we are, who we were. It is about the dreams and shadows of childhood which become part of the fabric of our adult lives. Examining the relationship between self and family has become a hallmark of contemporary life. It is an especially compelling journey for many of the 150 informants within this study.

As children and as adults, these informants' lives highlight two features which are central to all cultures: communication and family. Martha recalled this scene from her early childhood:

> I don't know if this really happened or I dreamed it. I was about three years old. It was absolutely dark all around me and I was afraid. I screamed out, but my parents couldn't hear me. They couldn't hear me. I kept screaming, Momma, Daddy, why can't you hear me? I'm afraid! Why can't you hear me? Why can't you hear me?

Richard's assessment of his childhood was both defiant and uncertain:

> Ever since I was little, people used to pat me on the head and tell me, "Now, you make sure you take care of your parents. You're all they've got." God! I hated it. I wanted to say, And who's supposed to take care of me?

Martha and Richard raise issues which cut across disciplines and geographic boundaries: How important is auditory language in any child's development? How much variation in family structure and roles is possible before individual family members are adversely affected?

These informants' lives appear to be a laboratory of human behavior which only the most perverse researcher could have invented -- as if a black family suddenly gave birth to a white child, or the changeling child of fairy tales. Given the enormous cultural significance of language and family, how do hearing children of deaf parents interpret this aspect of their lives? How do they make sense of their family history? Does it affect who they are today? And, reaching beyond the individual experience, is there any sense of a collective identity among these people? Or are these 150 separate lives, momentarily corralled within the confines of a researcher's paradigm?

Within the narratives of these informants, this dissertation examines myths and beliefs about hearing and deafness, about sound and silence. It concerns families, parents and children, and the assumptions and expectations which all of us hold to be not only important, but vital to our well being as individuals and as a society. Yet, ultimately, this dissertation is not about deaf people or hearing people. Nor about parents and children. It is about identity, about how we define and understand who we are within that vast spectrum of values and behaviors we call culture.

An Overview and Plan of the Dissertation

This dissertation is primarily an ethnography of the lives of 150 women and men, each of whom has experienced one common feature: having deaf parents. Agar (1980) describes ethnography as "committed to an understanding of a given instance of the human experience -- the environment that surrounds it, the history that precedes it, the intent of the persons who create it, and the pattern that gives it form" (p. 223). What was it like growing up with deaf parents? How has this family feature impacted their adult lives? How have they interpreted this facet of their lives -- unencumbered by disciplinary or methodological allegiances?

Informants' quotes are an integral part of this dissertation. They serve not only to illustrate my own premises, but to provide glimpses into the lives of these men and women. Although my selectivity of informants' words qualifies a reader's access to these men and women, their voices reach beyond the framework of this study. Their words can stand alone without explanation. I encourage all readers to listen to the poignant, humorous and powerful voices of these informants.

This dissertation is divided into four sections. The first section contains a single chapter, Chapter 1, which is an overview of hearing children of deaf parents as well as a discussion of the particular sample of informants. Also included in Chapter 1 are theoretical and methodological concerns. I have included these procedural discussions within the body of the dissertation because they are an integral part of how this dissertation unfolded and is to be understood.

Section II, Family Albums, is organized around the principal characters within informants' lives: Parents (Chapter 2); Grandparents (Chapter 3); the Deaf School and Deaf Family Friends (Chapter 4); and Siblings (Chapter 5). These portraits are an amalgam of childhood recollections and present adult interactions. Although each of these chapters provides important biographical and historical data, the primary intent of these chapters is to consider how informants' indentity and cultural affiliation is reflected in their descriptions and their interpretations of these family members.

Section III, Childhood Landscapes, shifts the focus from family members to informants' own experiences. Each of the four chapters in Section III explores routines, patterns and emotional threads which connect informants' childhoods to their present adult lives: Communication (Chapter 6); Family Roles (Chapter 7); Difference (Chapter 8); and being Deaf or Hearing (Chapter 9). Each of these topics touches upon fundamental assumptions with regard to language, family and culture.

The final Chapter examines adult identity within the crossroads of these two cultures, Deaf and Hearing. Chapter 10 describes how varying models of childhood and identity have informed these men and womens' explanations of their family experiences. This discussion leads to a more broadly based exploration of the cultural construction of identity.

The dissertation concludes with two appendices and a glossary. Appendix A is a brief demographic breakdown of the sample population including data on informants' parents. Appendix B concerns insider research -- my thoughts before and after conducting this study. The Glossary explains certain key terms and phrases used throughout this dissertation. For readers unfamiliar with communicative, educational and social aspects of deafness, the Glossary would be a particularly appropriate supplement to this Introduction.

CHAPTER 1: INTERPRETING OUR LIVES

Introduction to Chapter 1

You would not recognize them on the street or even within your own home. Their appearance and dress are as diverse as their life-styles. They are grey-haired grandparents and earringed punk rockers. They include politicians and teachers, bartenders and doctors. Some are even insurance salesmen.[1] Their speech is unremarkable -- except for the dialects and accents of their geographic home communities. Their demeanor can be shy and retiring. Some are boisterous and effusive. They are married, single, gay and straight. They are model citizens and have criminal records. Hearing children of deaf parents appear to be any man and any woman. Indeed, informants often described themselves as unusually adept at fitting into a variety of environments. You might never know.

Some keep their family history guarded. Others are quite open about it. Disclosure might occur in casual conversation or on national television. When she accepted her 1975 Oscar for Best Actress, Louise Fletcher tearfully thanked her mother

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[1] To those familiar with Deaf history, one of the most ironic occupations for a hearing child of deaf parents is that of insurance salesman. Although this is no longer true, insurance companies denied deaf drivers insurance for many years. This prejudice occurred despite driving records which were and remain far better than those of hearing drivers. One informant recalled how he, too, had been unable to obtain insurance because his father had no insurance.

and father in sign language. Whether a stranger or a fellow worker, reactions have included curiosity, pity, interest and silence. Informants have seen them all. Marilyn recalled a fairly common misunderstanding:

> And so he says, "Death? You mean your parents are dead?" And I said, "No, DEAF, my parents are deaf!

Jeff described how mentioning that his parents were deaf escalated into a major revelation:

> Like when I'm on a date and we're talking about our parents. We'll be laughing about something my father said or shake our heads about how our mothers are just alike. And then somewhere along the way she finds out that my parents are deaf. It just changes everything. They're not just a mother or father any more. They're these DEAF people!

When I talked with Anna, she remembered that such disclosures led to a shift with regard toward herself as well:

> Oh, they think, Oh, deaf, deaf, deaf. Your parents are deaf. And then after a few minutes, it's like they look at you with this, Oh, and are you weird too?

This chapter introduces hearing children of deaf parents -- discussing both what has been written about them as well as what has been omitted. The body of this chapter concerns the narrower universe of my sample of informants. As will be discussed, there is no available estimate of the population size or characteristics of all hearing children of deaf parents. Therefore, these observations cannot be expected to apply to all hearing children of deaf parents and conclusions drawn can not be extrapolated with complete confidence. Finally, this chapter includes theoretical and methodological considerations which have guided this study and are an integral part of how this dissertation evolved.

An Overview

Three generations within a family history: unsuspecting hearing parents have a deaf child; that deaf child grows up and typically marries another deaf person; deaf parents give birth to a hearing child. Almost ninety percent of the children born to two deaf parents are hearing.[2] This inversion appears to reinstate the normal order of things. Very few of these hearing children will have deaf children.[3] The generation of deaf parents represents a momentary disruption in a hearing family history. The legacy of deafness remains suspended. Within another family, another pair of hearing parents begins the cycle again.

Although hearing children of deaf parents do not overtly share their parents' functional condition, they potentially inherit a sensibility and a cultural legacy which is unlike

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[2] Schein and Delk (1974) report that of the children born to couples where at least one spouse is deaf, 88% have normal hearing. This decreases to 81% when both parents are congenitally deaf.

[3] There are no available figures on the number of hearing children of deaf parents who have a deaf child. Among all 150 informants, 81 had at least one child. Of these 81, 4 had one deaf child; one informant had more than one deaf child. The likelihood of a hearing child of deaf parents themselves having a deaf child varies according to the etiologies of parental deafness. For most adult hearing children of deaf parents, the likelihood is no greater than the general population. For an additional discussion on this, see Chapter 8, pp. 247-254.

that of any other hearing child. Unlike even their own deaf parents -- most of whom were raised by hearing parents, these hearing children have been raised on the peripheries and often within the heart of an exclusively Deaf world. As children and as adults, they are poised on the brink of this remarkable world which is usually only superficially accessible to those who can hear.

The condition of deafness creates a community with a separate language and a distinct culture.[4] Although over 90% of deaf children have hearing parents and although the careers and residences of life-long deaf adults disperse them throughout the larger hearing society, most life-long deaf adults socialize exclusively with other deaf people. As children, deaf people develop close and lasting friendships with their deaf school peers -- from whom they learn a sense of shared identity, a cultural heritage and a means of communication. As adults, they participate in a wide variety of exclusively deaf social organizations ranging from sports to religious groups. Schein and Delk (1974) estimate that deaf people have an 85-95% endogamous marriage rate.

A number of writers distinguish between the clinical condition of deafness and those deaf people who form a

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[4] Of approximately 2 million profoundly deaf Americans, it is estimated that 400,000 are pre-vocationally deaf -- the most common profile for members of the Deaf community.

cultural community.[5] Most culturally deaf people have moderate to profound hearing losses since birth or childhood. Yet, hearing loss itself is not a sufficient criterion to be considered culturally deaf. Being culturally deaf is interdependent on the individual's identification with the group and the group's evaluation and acceptance of the individual. This assessment is largely based on a sense of cultural familiarity: a breadth of life experiences associated with being deaf; routinely participating in social interactions with other deaf people; and sharing similar social behaviors, historical traditions and a common destiny (Andersson 1987). American Sign Language (ASL) is regarded by many as an integral feature of Deaf culture. Yet, not all culturally deaf persons are fluent in ASL -- including a small minority who often oppose the use of any sign language. Unlike most definitions of Deaf culture, the one proposed here includes deaf persons who are oral -- that is, deaf people who do not use sign language as their primary form of communication.[6] This inclusion is supported by informant interviews in which a sense of cultural deafness and community

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[5] Woodward (1972) began the convention of distinguishing functional hearing loss (deaf) from someone who identifies him or herself as part of a cultural community (Deaf). Because these distinctions were not consistently used among informants, the capitalized term 'Deaf' will be used only to refer to the more generalized Deaf world and Deaf people (see pp 43-44 for a more specific explanation of how this term is used in this dissertation.)

[6] See Glossary for additional description and explanation of 'oralism.'

underlies non-signing as well as signing deaf parents.

Among the general population, there is a continuum of acute hearing to profound deafness. Yet, within the Deaf community ambiguity is rarely allowed: people are either hearing or deaf. Foster (1989) has demonstrated how this dichotomization is both reaction and assertion: deaf individuals seek out other deaf people in response to their sense of alienation from hearing people, as well as finding positive value in the affiliation with other deaf people. The polarization between the deaf and the hearing cultures is frequently enhanced by two significantly different communication systems: English and American Sign Language. While characteristics ascribed to either deaf or hearing people are not consistent, what has endured is the dichotomization -- there is a Deaf world, and there is a Hearing world. As adults, most culturally deaf people maintain a highly homogenous world -- until the birth of their hearing child.

Numbers

There is no available estimate of the number of hearing children of deaf parents within the United States. This is due primarily to difficulties in characterizing the population: (1) defining deafness in the parent(s); (2) deciding whether to include families in which only one parent is deaf; and (3) defining hearing acuity in the child.

(1) Deafness can be defined according to four interrelated features: the measured degree of hearing loss; the age of onset of hearing loss; present level of functioning; and/or self-identification (Myklebust 1960; Schein and Delk 1974; Padden 1980; Foster 1989). Consequently, estimates of the deaf population in the U.S. can vary from 250,000 (only those individuals who are profoundly prelingually deaf) to 16 million (which includes the profoundly deaf as well as individuals with mild, adventitious, or progressive hearing losses) (U.S. Social Security Administration 1977; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1988).

(2) If one parent is prevocationally deaf,[7] it is very likely that the other parent will be as well. Although national figures are unavailable, data from smaller scale studies indicate that it is highly probable that a prevocationally deaf person will marry another prevocationally deaf person. Of those persons deaf before age 6, 83.5% of women and 91.9% of men will marry another deaf person. These figures drop dramatically for those who become deaf after age 20 -- only 5.6% of men and 2% of women will marry another deaf person (Lunde and Bigman 1959; Schein and Delk 1974).

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[7] See Glossary for 'prevocationally,' 'prelingually,' and 'postlingually' deaf.

(3) Genetics and population studies predict that 90% of children born to two deaf parents will have normal hearing (Stevenson and Cheeseman 1956; Rainer et al. 1963). The remaining 10% are children who are born with or develop mild to profound hearing losses. There has been no research on the frequency of deaf children born to hearing children of deaf parents. Among these informants, only 5 out of the 141 men and women with two deaf parents had a deaf child. None of the remaining informants with one deaf and one hearing parent had a deaf child.

My own preliminary interviews indicate that no single set of criteria can be used to identify an adult hearing child of deaf parents. Although adult hearing children of two prelingually deaf parents have consistently identified themselves as adult hearing children of deaf parents, (some) other adults have also identified themselves within this group: those with only one deaf parent, those whose parents have mild hearing losses, and those adult children who themselves have developed some degree of hearing loss as adults.

The difficulty in estimating the size and demographic characteristics of deaf people and their hearing children raises an important issue. Variation is part of what creates the Deaf community. When among other deaf people, individual characteristics and personalities can emerge. They are no longer faceless DEAF people. Paradoxically, deaf people must maintain a certain allegiance to their community by identifying themselves as DEAF -- despite variations in actual hearing loss or speaking ability.

Previous Studies

A small body of research has developed around hearing children of deaf parents. These studies have generally emerged from one of two disciplines: linguistics and psychology. This population provides a unparalleled opportunity to explore the development of language. How does a hearing child learn to speak and learn language when surrounded by silence? How does a visual-spatial language system compare with an auditory-oral language? Most of these linguistic inquiries have typically focused on infants and young children (Critchley 1967; Schiff and Ventry 1976; Bonvillian et al. 1981; Murphy and Slorach 1983). A second group of researchers have considered the psychosocial impact of having deaf parents (Pietrulewicz 1975; Dent 1982; Rienzi 1990; Frankenberg 1985; Charleson 1990). These studies, too, have largely considered younger populations.

Many of these studies presume the same deficit model which has dominated studies of deaf people. Their implicit approach has been to discover how this experience has damaged them -- including possible speech disorders and dysfunctional family interactions. Yet, such studies are often tautological. Many of the sample populations and individual cases were obtained from speech and language clinics or from those who were given or sought out therapeutic intervention. Aside from those studies which are pathologically biased, other comparative studies have been inconclusive (Charleson 1990; Chan and Lui 1990). Although these and other researchers reported impressionistic differences between hearing children of deaf parents and a control group of hearing children of hearing parents, they were unable to substantiate any differences using standardized psychosocial measurements. Finally, whether considering deaf persons or those with deaf parents, researchers have overfocused on children and ignored a life course approach which recognizes that both deaf and hearing children grow up.

As adults, hearing children of deaf parents have remained largely invisible within research. The exceptions to this are studies such as those by Arlow (1976), Taska and Rhoads (1981) and Wagenheim (1985) which generalize on the basis of a single case study. A few other researchers have concentrated on performance measurement in the areas of language acquisition and communication skills (Bellugi and Fischer 1972; Poizner et al. 1981). Neville's (1990) fascinating study at the Salk Institute compared hemispheric dominance in deaf and hearing individuals; she also included a third group -- adult hearing children of deaf parents who had acquired ASL as their first language. She found that these adult hearing children of deaf parents processed visual information much more like deaf people than hearing people and that both groups displayed significantly increased left hemisphere activity compared with hearing people. Bunde (1979) and Wilbur (1986) have each conducted large scale surveys of adult hearing children. Bunde and Wilbur's research were important first steps in delineating some features of this population and in suggesting future research directions. Yet, these studies were limited by their research design -- mailed surveys using a predetermined list of questions and possible responses -- as well as by sample populations which were largely derived from persons who worked as intepreters. Overall, research has yet to include a broad range of hearing adult children and to give primacy to their interpretation of their family experiences.

In contrast to the pathologically-oriented and constructivist approaches to deafness, a handful of researchers and writers have begun allowing deaf people to tell their own story (Jacobs 1974; Becker 1980, Higgins 1980; Padden and Humphries 1988; Wilcox 1989; Lane 1989; Lane 1992). These studies offer a remarkably different perspective -- contrasting with previous observations which focused on myriad problems or presumed characteristics of those affected by deafness. Through these more phenomenologically-oriented studies, we learn how deaf people make sense of their world, of a community which has developed not only compensations but unique cultural dimensions. These researchers have also taken note of an intriguing research subpopulation: hearing children of deaf parents. Higgins (1980) and Sacks (1989) both point out the paradoxical position that hearing children of deaf parents assume within the Deaf community. Padden (1980) felt a study of hearing children of deaf parents would provide an understanding of how hearing loss shapes the culture of Deaf people. Yet, aside from individual autobiographical accounts (Walker 1986; Glickfeld 1989; Sidransky 1990) the challenge to research has remained unanswered.

Theoretical Contexts

This study focuses on hearing adults who were raised by deaf parents. In my research design, I excluded a number of other possible populations: adults who had been raised by parents with other types of disabilities or health conditions, deaf parents, adult deaf children of deaf parents, and younger hearing children of deaf parents. While each of these additional groups merits consideration for future research, I restricted this study for theoretical and practical reasons. First, the fundamental premise of this dissertation is that a Deaf culture exists. This degree of cultural distinction does not appear to hold as tightly among those with other types of disabilities or chronic health conditions.[8] However, sorting out the functional condition of deafness from the cultural experience of deafness has been more problematic. Researchers have repeatedly acknowledged that hearing loss is <u>not</u> a satisfactory criterion or description of Deaf culture. What, then, is Deaf culture? Andersson (1987) notes,"Unfortunately, field or historical studies about the social life of deaf people which could provide evidence on the development of deaf culture are still seriously lacking" (p. 261). This dissertation is in part a response to this need.

Although an increasing number of studies endorse the conceptualization of 'Deaf culture,' many writers have avoided clarifying their central premise: what do they mean by 'culture'? For some, the appearance of difference alone is sufficient to merit cultural consideration. Using difference as a criterion for culture ignores an important component of culture: those aspects which are shared within the group. Other writers emphasize the distinct language of the Deaf. Yet, equating language with culture overstates the

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[8] Like many deaf people, those with other types of disabilities and health conditions are frequently excluded from mainstream society. Many have coalesced and identified themselves as a minority group. In the 1987 ICD Survey of Americans with Disabilities, 74% of respondents reported feeling some sense of common identity with other people with disabilities. Unlike the Deaf, however, these individuals share a fundamental cultural feature with those non-disabled and non-affected: a common language. This shared language increases the potential for their exposure to similar cultural values and behaviors as well as their capacity for daily interaction with others.

relationship and ultimately provides a circular definition of culture. Some writers have skirted the conceptual issue by endorsing a political perspective: a cultural view of deafness is superior to one which pathologizes. Others have bogged down in equivocating whether to describe the Deaf as a culture or a sub-culture. My stance on Deaf culture is informed by my view of culture which includes four components: 1) a system of shared ideas and behaviors, 2) which are distinct, 3) which are learned, and 4) which provide a template for personal and social interaction. Culture explains and restricts how things are known, affecting both the practical and the symbolic realms. The intensity and the flexibility of these cultural templates vary for individual members, and are influenced by the history of the culture as well as interactions with other cultures.

A second reason for restricting the population studied concerns cultural transmission. A sizeable and distinguished cohort of anthropologists has focused on the intersection of culture and the individual -- attempting to unravel the problem of how people are socialized to become members of their cultural group. Much of this research has focused on the family as the primary arena of socialization. Yet, because 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents, most deaf children learn Deaf culture from outside their family. Studies by Becker (1980), Meadow-Orlans et al. (1987), Padden and Humphries (1988) and others have shown how Deaf culture is transmitted to other deaf individuals primarily through deaf peers. Because deaf children are largely shut off from Hearing culture, Deaf culture represents one of the rare instances in which peer socialization is the primary arena of socialization, consistently exceeding or replacing that of the family. Complementing these studies, writers have also substantiated that deaf children of deaf parents are the symbolic if not practical core of Deaf culture.

These previous studies have examined the issue of cultural transmission among deaf individuals, yet there is a significant omission: What happens to the children of deaf parents who are not deaf? Deaf culture has developed around a particular functional condition. Is this culture transmitted to their hearing children -- even though they are so evidently different from their parents? How do these children learn about being hearing? How are they viewed within Deaf and Hearing cultures, and how do they align themselves culturally as adults?

A third reason for focusing only on adult hearing children of deaf parents was quite simple: this group has not been adequately studied. Previous research relies primarily on individual case studies, surveys, or individual autobiographical accounts. There has been <u>no</u> study which gives primacy to a broad cross-section of hearing children of deaf parents. A number of writers argue that traditional models of human development ignore people's everyday life experiences (Bertaux 1981; Cohler 1982; Gergen and Davies 1985; Kaufman 1986). Instead of structured models of development (which generally stress either stability or progressive change), these authors propose research which incorporates subjective experience. This phenomenological approach allows informants to construct and interpret their own life experiences. Developmental theory and research which rely solely upon experimental and survey methods is seen as inadequate to describe diverse and often unpredictable life experiences (Ferrarotti 1981; Gergen and Gergen 1983).

Through these interviews, informants shared their personal histories as well as how they have made sense of their lives. These individual and collective accounts provide what Gergen and Gergen have called "narratives of self." These men and women have constructed a narrative around one variable in their life. Many of those I spoke with were ideal informants in that they had long considered the very question I was asking: What did this all mean? In piecing together the meaning of having deaf parents, informants utilized not only their specific intra-family experiences, but a wider social and cultural context.

Contemporary life has become synonymous with the search for self, the relationship between our past and our present. The term 'identity' has become a lightning rod for interdisciplinary scrutiny and squabble, mirroring the ethereal and composite views of self. DeVos (1975), Alba

(1990) and others have described Americans' preoccupation with a particular facet of identity -- ethnic origins and cultural affiliation: whom to include, exclude, accept or reject. A major focus of this dissertation concerns ethnic identity. Alba (1990) describes ethnic identity as "a person's subjective orientation toward his or her ethnic origins" (p. 25). My hunch when I started this research -- which may have been as much subconscious as conscious -- was that cultural affiliation and ethnic identity were important issues for this population. During these open-ended unstructured interviews, informants spontaneously raised this concern within a broad spectrum of topics and issues. Their narratives of self went beyond what Gans (1979) has described as 'symbolic identity' -- a primarily abstract affiliation which has little content or bearing on everyday life. Among many of these informants, the question of identity and cultural affiliation was not a "practiced avocation." These informants share a vision of ethnic identity which has real consequences in their personal lives and everyday interactions.

This dissertation also peers beyond the specific context of hearing children of deaf parents to investigate the relationship between identity and family. Within Western thought, parent and family experiences are generally assumed to surpass all other variables in shaping one's identity. Whether through unseen genes or remembered childhood, we lay considerable baggage at the feet of our parents. An enormous body of professional and popular literature unequivocally identifies the family as the lens through which we understand who we are, how we came to be who we are. Unlike the Azande, we do not use witches to explain why things turn out the way they do. Unlike the Dogon, we do not point to the wind. We are the inheritors of our family: they have caused us to be. Yet, when we assess who we are in light of our childhood experiences, what informs this perspective?[9] How variable and culturally constructed are these concepts of family, of parents, of childhood? How ethnocentric is the presumed linkage between childhood experience and adult identity? And, if flawed or ethnocentric, why does this model of identity remain so salient within Western thought? These discussions form not separate sections but heuristic strands throughout this dissertation.

A final note on my research design concerns omitting informants under the age of 18. I excluded this younger population for several reasons. On a practical level, it would have been much more difficult to secure permission from the University Human Subjects Committee to interview children.

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[9] Taussig (1988) discusses separating out 'how' from 'why': "The salient distinction to note is that in Azande epistemology there is a vastly different conception of facts and things. Facts are not separated from values, physical manifestations are not torn from their social contexts, and it requires therefore no great effort of mind to read social relations into material events. It is a specifically modern problem wherein things like my bodily organs are at one instant mere things, and at another instant question me insistently with all too human a voice regarding the social significance of their dis-ease" (p. 4).

This would also have involved securing parental permission and, on the basis of preliminary investigations, many informants would have been guarded or not have participated at all if their parents were involved. Finally, I was interested in examining the long-term effects of these family experiences. Adults have economic and social opportunities to situate themselves outside their families, and to establish their own cultural affiliation and identity.

Methods

Data for this dissertation is based primarily on interviews and life histories with these one hundred and fifty women and men. The youngest informant had just turned 18, the oldest would celebrate an 80th birthday a few months after our interview.[10] These interviews lasted from just under an hour to seven hours, averaging a little over two hours per interview. I met with eighteen informants more than once. With three exceptions, all interviews were tape-recorded. I also collected additional data at local, regional and national meetings of CODA (Children of Deaf Adults).[11] Forty-three

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[10] In addition to using pseudonyms, I sometimes deliberately avoid specifying an informant's gender.

[11] Children of Deaf Adults (CODA) is a nine year old organization which includes nearly 800 members throughout the U.S and several foreign countries. Membership is generally restricted to hearing persons who grew up with at least one deaf parent. Almost all of the current members are adults over 18 years of age. The organization's stated mission to "address bicultural experiences through conferences, support groups, and resource development."

of the 150 informants had been or were presently participants in this organization.

Identifying informants was alternately a random and a systematic process. Initially, potential informants were randomly drawn from a compilation of names and addresses I had collected over the two years prior to these interviews. Most of these names came from three sources: 1) various agencies, organizations and schools working with the deaf; 2) CODA; and 3) referrals by potential informants to other childhood or adult acquaintances. I sent out letters of request to a randomized list of one hundred persons throughout the United States. In the letter, I briefly described my intent to do an ethnographic study of adult hearing children of deaf parents. Using life histories and open-ended interviews, informants would talk about their lives growing up and their present adult lives. In asking for their consent to be interviewed, I promised confidentiality and anonymity. My only initial stipulation for participation in this study was that the person was hearing, 18 years of age or older, and had two deaf parents. I did not spell out any criteria for hearing or deafness. My targeted sample population was to be fifty persons.

In my initial contact letter, I explained that I, too, was a hearing adult with two deaf parents. My decision to acknowledge my own family history was based on three factors: 1) In a preliminary pilot study of 10 adults, those participants unanimously felt my family history should be disclosed at the onset of the study. Six felt they would not have participated in a study of this nature if the researcher did not have this similar family background. All but one said they would have felt manipulated and deceived if I withheld my family history from them. 2) I do not conceal my family history from other populations I have worked with or studied. This is an integral part of my own history and often comes up spontaneously and naturally in conversation. Disguising myself would have run counter to my intention of conducting open and naturalistic exchanges with informants. 3) Although almost all of these interviews were conducted in spoken English, many informants used occasional to frequent signs during the interview process. My expressive and receptive signing skills are often recognizable as coming from a deaf family. (I had not expected that a number of informants would also notice and comment on my use of appropriate visual cues. See p. 33.) Appendix B is devoted to a lengthier discussion of the advantages and biases of insider research.

I had to revise the sample size for this study twice -- first to one hundred, and finally to one hundred and fifty. These increases reflected an unexpected outpouring of interest and support for this project. I received letters and phone calls from people who had heard about this study. Other potential informants told me they had a childhood friend or a sister or a brother who might be interested in participating.

Deaf parents sent me the names of their children. I had not anticipated such enthusiasm; it had not been reflected in previous studies or in my own initial pilot study which indicated that many potential informants would be reluctant to discuss their family histories and their lives. Informants themselves offered three reasons for their willingness to participate. First, many were eager to tell their own story. Dave told me:

> Oh, you got me when you said I could talk as long as I liked. [Laughs.] You wanted to hear my side of it, my story. I don't know that I get many opportunities to really talk about it. Not now.

Secondly, my shared history provided me entree into a family life often off-limits to outsiders. One informant, Vera, explained why she decided to participate:

> You know, at first I wasn't going to do this. I've been through this my whole life. People always wanting to know, always wanting to look at me and my parents. It's like, 'What makes you tick?' I'm tired of all that. At least maybe now, I'll get to say what I think...And, even though I don't know you, I know you. You know what it's like. Partly, I don't have to do so much explaining. But, I guess, it's also that I can trust you. Because it's not just my family we're talking about, it's yours too.

Finally, in addition to my pledges of confidentiality, the large and nationally diverse sample size itself convinced several people who expressed concerns about anonymity that they would not be recognizable in this study.

Balancing a preliminary clustering of potential informants with geographic diversity, I selected eight regions across the country as my main interview sites. As time went on, I scrambled to broaden the demographic variation without creating a logistical nightmare. I stepped up my efforts to find people who did not work with deaf people, who were older or younger, and those who belonged to ethnic and racial minorities. I also solicited for a variety of perspectives. I asked people, Do you know anyone with deaf parents who seems totally unlike you? Anyone who has an entirely different take on their experiences? Some people suggested their own siblings and, although this affected the randomization, I concluded that siblings from the same family would be an important dimension of this study. I interviewed 6 sets of siblings. Two people wrote and told me that although they only had one deaf parent (the other was hearing), they felt that many of their issues and perspectives would be similar to those with two deaf parents. Nine informants had one deaf and one hearing parent.

I utilized two, sometimes conflicting, population standards. Overall, the sample follows current U.S. census demographics for adults in terms of gender, age, and race: a roughly equal number of men and women; a gradient from young to old, with the majority between 25 and 55; and a majority of European whites with decreasing numbers of African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans. This approach, however, represents the demographics of the Hearing world. Although deafness usually occurs without regard to any particular demographic variable,[12] by the time deaf persons have begun to have families, their demographics have undergone considerable clarification. This is particularly true when considering the Deaf community or culture. In certain features, the sample population reflects the cultural and economic impact of deafness on the parents: a majority of informant's parents were educated in residential schools for the deaf (81.6%), married another deaf person (94.0%), and socialized almost exclusively with other deaf people; and a majority of informants' family of origin were described as poor, working class or lower-middle class. Despite efforts to maintain a broad cross-section of the sample population, informants were highly represented in two areas: a majority (128 out of 150) considered themselves middle class, and a significant number (65 out of 150) were employed full- or part-time with deaf children and/or adults. Since there is no demographic information on the entire population of adult hearing children of deaf parents, it is impossible to establish whether these two features are characteristic of this population as a whole.

There were a few people who did not want to talk with me. Less than one-fifth of those initially contacted by letter did not respond, and their reluctance can only be surmised. Other

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[12] Notable exceptions to these are Native American populations which have a higher incidence of otitis media, and rubella epidemics which create sharp increases in the incidence of deafness among the general population.

potential informants were contacted by third parties, but did not want their names given to me. One of them, I was told, was "not ready to talk about all this." I spoke directly with only five people who declined to participate. Three of these cited concerns about confidentiality. Another felt it would be too much of a time commitment. Finally, I was unable to convince one woman who told me that "My story isn't that interesting...Just the usual stuff. You probably have a lot more interesting people." Two other people who initially declined to be interviewed agreed to participate as long as I did not tape-record the interview.

During the eleven months I conducted fieldwork, my life was a revolving door of packing, unpacking and re-packing -- and driving. Unlike most anthropologists, my fieldsites were fluid and changable. Within the eight geographic sites, I would sometimes drive between one and three hundred miles a day in pursuit of that elusive ultimate informant. By the time I had completed my fieldwork, I had met informants in 24 different states.[13] My time alone in the car allowed me to spin my own webs of significance -- to ruminate on the previous interview while preparing for the next one. Although these hundred and fifty men and women were dispersed throughout the country, my immersion into their separate lives often created the illusion of a single community. As my

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[13] Although I met with informants in 24 different states, informants themselves considered 32 different states their principal residence.

fieldwork progressed, I would often create dialogues between informants who had never met: "Someone I interviewed told me this...What do you think?"

I almost always interviewed people alone -- usually in their homes, sometimes at work, and a few times at places of mutual convenience. These environments provided an added dimension to the interview itself, allowing me to observe the rhythms and contexts of informants' daily lives. We did not always use our voices or sign (see Chapter 6 for additional discussion on this). Several informants showed me photographs, artwork, writings and a variety of mementos they felt conveyed their experiences. Before or after our interviews, I was frequently introduced to informants' spouses, children, co-workers, neighbors and friends. These others helped enrich my sense of these men and women by broadening my focus on a singular aspect of informants' lives. Many of these family members and friends also shared their own perspectives and opinions on the meaning and impact of having deaf parents.

In addition to the groups of siblings I interviewed, a number of informants knew each other or knew of each other. I was frequently asked whether or not I was going to interview a particular person. I often felt myself being evasive and replying in generalities in order to maintain confidentiality. Many of these inquiries were merely attempts to help me find more informants. Yet, this curiosity was also motivated by a desire to know what others were saying -- not out of a sense of prying, but out of a more fundamental struggle of trying to piece together their own experiences: Did anyone else ever tell you this? Did anyone else ever feel that? It is this struggle, ultimately, which forms the basis of this dissertation.

Very often people wanted to know details about my own family history as well. I wrestled to keep the focus on informants' experiences so that I would not bias or distort their perspectives. Yet, some degree of personal sharing was both affirming and reciprocal. Like several other informants, Emily remarked that just by the way I watched her and responded to her, she knew that I came from a deaf family and that she could trust me. Tom told me:

> I always knew there were others like me...but I never got a chance to talk with them. I don't know anyone else like me. You know, with deaf parents. You're the first one.

Because of the potential bias of being an insider, I kept a daily journal of my own perspectives and family history, and constantly checked my perceptions with friends and colleagues around me. Most of the interviews, all my field notes and my own daily journal were transcribed. I used a combination of Ethnograph and my own data management program to analyse and code this data. From this compilation, patterns and themes began to emerge. Throughout the process of writing this dissertation, I would stop and listen to a randomly selected tape of an interview, asking myself, Is this person's life reflected in what I am saying?

The Sample Population

This study began as a series of interviews with 150 separate individuals. Although this dissertation considers the shared cultural experiences among these men and women, there were many differences -- among informants as well as their family backgrounds. The individual personalities of grandparents, parents and informants each contributed to distinct family histories. Economic and educational factors impacted informant's childhood experiences along with family composition, informant's gender and birth order. While parental deafness tempered ethnic and racial family heritages among almost all informants, these features still had an impact. Most notably, informants who were also minorities reported their parents had far less access to economic and educational resources than the already restricted opportunities available to European-American deaf people.

Other than their parents, many informants had no or very few other deaf relatives. In contrast, a few informants were the only hearing child in a long line of deaf grandparents, parents and siblings. The proximity to and interaction with other deaf people in the community strongly affected the family's sense of isolation and uniqueness. Communication methods and styles varied considerably among individual deaf parents and their hearing children. Although most parents used some form of sign language, a few parents disavowed sign language and used lipreading or speaking. (Chapter 6 focuses on communication issues; the Glossary includes a brief description of various forms of signed and spoken languages.)

In addition to idiosyncratic family and personal variables, historical and developmental cohorts developed among informants. Historical groupings reflected educational and technological changes which affected the available methods and styles of communication.[14] Some older informants reported their parents had gone to schools in which sign language was an acceptable part of the school curriculum. The parents of most informants -- especially those between the ages of 30 and 65 -- had experienced educational policies which prohibited or denigrated sign language. Many younger informants felt the growing public acceptance of sign language and awareness of deaf people made their own childhoods somewhat less stigmatizing. Technological innovations -- whether for hearing people or for deaf people -- affected routine family interactions. Many older informants rarely interpreted phone calls or television shows for their parents because these devices had not been available. This contrasts with most informants -- again those between 30 and 65 -- for

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[14] Harlan Lane provides a scholarly and detailed account of educational and social changes towards deaf people in _When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf_, New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

whom telephone and television interpreting were often regular features of their home life. Since the development of adaptive equipment such as the TTY and decoder,[15] younger informants generally had to do far less interpreting for their parents. Also, with the availability of professional interpreter services, younger informants were more likely to have parents who occasionally used professional interpreters instead of the informant.

The age of informants also affected how they interpreted their childhood experiences. This follows Erikson's life-long process of identity in which each stage of the life-cycle has particular features, crises and developmental resolutions. Certain themes were much more prevalent among a given age cohort of informants: younger informants were much more concerned with identity and role confusion; older informants were generally more resolved about such issues. Additionally, younger informants were more likely to be actively involved with their families while many older informants' parents were deceased.

It is important to clarify a number of assumptions that are commonly made about hearing children of deaf parents. These assumptions are held by outsiders and sometimes by informants themselves. While these issues will be elaborated upon in succeeding chapters, some generalizations can be made. First, a number of informants did <u>not</u> sign as children -- even

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[15] See Glossary for 'TTY' and 'decoder.'

if sign language was their parents' primary means of communication. The reasons and the impact of this will be explored particularly in Chapters 4 and 7. Second, the amount of interpreting that any one informant did varied tremendously among informants and among siblings. Third, over half of these men and women did not work in a job related to deaf people (such as interpreting, counseling or teaching.) Fourth, although they may have routinely interacted with other hearing children of deaf parents when younger, many informants had little or no contact with other hearing children of deaf parents as adults.[16] Outside of their own siblings, several informants had not met another hearing adult with deaf parents until they talked with me. This changed somewhat over the course of the research as more and more people became involved in or aware of the national organization CODA.

Appendix A provides a brief demographic overview of the sample population.

Names

In the literature, a number of clever names and awkward acronyms have been used to identify hearing children of deaf parents: Interpreters of Deaf Parentage (IODP); Hearing Children of Deaf Parents (HCDP); Deaf Parented Family (DPF);

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[16] Informants who worked with deaf people were far more likely to meet and know other adult hearing children of deaf parents. Many of these informants described such interactions as professional rather than personal friendships.

Hearing Adolescents of Deaf Parents (HADP); Adult Hearing Children of Deaf Parents (AHCDP). In choosing a name to identify a group of people being written about, anthropologists have traditionally relied on the term(s) used by the people themselves. In this case, naming this group raises issues for informants as well as the researcher. With the establishment of CODA (Children of Deaf Adults) nine years ago, an increasing number of people have begun referring to themselves as 'codas.' While many deaf people as well as other professionals working with deaf persons have also adopted this term, there is considerable dissention as these two informants attested:

> [Mel:] What is that they're calling us? Codas? What's that supposed to mean? Coda! Who makes up these names anyway?
>
> [Bill:] I don't like the name 'coda.' I don't mind being called a child, but I object to being connected to deaf adults. It's not just deaf adults that I am related to, it's my deaf parents. It should be something like CODP (Children of Deaf Parents)...I'll always be a child in relation to my parent, but I am an adult in relation to other adults, deaf or hearing.

Other informants familiar with CODA felt that the organization represented a particular philosophical or political stance and dissociated themselves from the term 'coda.'

Choosing a single label also ignores the fact that several informants did not identify themselves as part of a larger group:

> I don't really think I have that much in common [with other hearing people whose parents are deaf]. Maybe a little bit, but it's mostly history. Our lives are so different now. Besides, when I was a kid I had to deal with things on my own. It was just me and my parents. There wasn't anybody else involved.

Deaf parents, too, while recognizing differences between themselves and their hearing children, often did not see hearing children of deaf parents as having a shared identity. Jill described this scene with her mother:

> I was trying to explain to my mother about getting together [with other hearing children of deaf parents]. She looked at me and said, You mean they're deaf? [Signs "No, they're hearing, but their parents are deaf...Like me."] So she nodded, but I could tell that she was thinking, Why on earth would you want to do something like that?

Rather than imposing my own label or acronym on these informants, I often resort to using such vague terms as "these men and women" or "those interviewed." I also use the anthropologist's perennial favorite: 'informants.' In some sense, this descriptor fits this particular group very well. Most of these women and men have had a life-time of being informants: to the hearing world about the deaf; to the deaf world about the hearing. Part of what made these men and women ideal informants is that they have independently considered and interpreted their family history, and having deaf parents was an extremely salient part of their lives.

The pseudonyms that are used to identify individual informants represent somewhat of a hearing bias. These are spoken and written English names. Although informants were indeed known by such names, within the context of their deaf families, they were often known by other names. Like most individuals within the Deaf community, more than half of all informants had sign names -- a unique sign for that individual. Almost all informants' spoken names were pronounced differently by their deaf parents. To outsiders, deaf people's pronunciation of spoken words often appeared to be gutteral or high-pitched sounds unrelated to spoken words. Informants, however, recognized their deaf parent's voiced names for them with familiarity and special fondness.

Parameters and Limitations

A number of factors which contribute to the breadth of this study also limit its generalizability. The sample population ranged from 18 to 79 years of age and represented diverse geographic, educational and family backgrounds. It is not my intention to delineate between these strands in the present work. While the data collected does suggest differences according to these and other features, my primary intent is to understand this population as a whole.

The cultural emphasis of this dissertation has affected how this project was conceived, carried out, and ultimately written. This perspective has frequently meant challenging and sometimes displacing traditionally held biomedical interpretations and psychological repercussions of deafness. This is not an airtight stance. Hearing loss is a very real condition with very real consequences. Yet, a long history of explanations and responses to deafness has reflected biases of the dominant Hearing culture and continues to overshadow those of deaf people themselves. Nor are deaf people immune to this cultural hegemony. As Ortner (1974) suggests, both those in power as well as those depreciated often learn the same versions of truth which uplifts one group while condemning another.

This dissertation is not, however, an uncritical homage to Deaf culture. Nor is it possible to extract Deaf culture from Hearing culture. My intent in this dissertation is to focus on Deaf culture within the context of Hearing culture. These informants provide a dialectic which incorporates the conflicts and the resolutions of these two often opposing world views. Traditional anthropological constructs of culture as pristine and unchanging have been replaced by recognizing culture as fluid and dynamic. What becomes important is not only an understanding of the characteristics and internal values of a particular culture, but multiple perspectives which consider what happens when cultures collide. In an increasingly complex and interactive world, these encounters have become the norm rather than the exception.

My study roused the attention and curiosity of many other adult hearing children of deaf parents, deaf people and hearing professionals working with deaf people. My methods and my progress were often under the scrutiny of informants as well. Ablon (1977) points out one of the hazards of fieldwork in the United States is an inability to completely detach or escape your informants' gaze. Informants offered me insights and often opinions not only concerning their own life but of the larger group as well. Informants' input into my own creative process has been invaluable. Yet, this dissertation ultimately reflects my own bias of considering shared experiences and broader cultural meanings rather than those of a single individual. I reject Turner's view that it is the researcher rather than the informant whose perspective approximates some greater truth.[17] However, the illusion of researcher omniscience remains an inescapable construct of written discourse. My insider status further problematizes the dilemma of post-modern anthropologists: whose voice does the reader hear? Although I have attempted to give primacy to the voices of these men and women, I recognize the danger of commodification of others' narratives. Jackson (1987) describes the fundamental goal of an anthropologists is to let those studied reveal themselves "so we can better see what the world looks like through their eyes" (p. 82). Although sound advice, this approach is more often an ideal rather than an achievable goal. Although selected examples and quotations

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[17] In The Forest of Symbols (1967), Victor Turner proposes a heirarchy of data: 1) those which are external and observable; 2) those interpretations offered by laymen and specialists; and 3) those worked out by the anthropologist.

are unequally represented from among all informants, at least one quotation occurs from each of the 150 men and women interviewed. So many voices may overburden the reader with somewhat of a staccato effect. My intent was not to subsume all of these men and women into my own singular vision but to force myself to consider all perspectives -- no matter how disparate any one individual's account might be. While attempting to reconcile the sometimes conflicting interpretations that informants gave, I recognized one underlying commonality: that these women and men struggled with and were making interpretations.

A final limitation concerns the artificiality of examining a single human variable. Although having deaf parents was and is a significant feature in the lives of these informants, it is only one part of their lives. No one is just a child or just a parent. Whether deaf or African-American or male, human lives manage to be far more mercurial than any laboratory construction. We are not only more than the sum of our parts. Each part, each role is itself fluid and contingent on other parts and on others. Sarah, one of my last informants reminded me of my own research blinders:

> I get tired of having to explain myself to everyone. To explain about deafness, to explain about my parents. Sure, I think it's important that people understand, but sometimes I just want to be myself. I don't want to be connected to all this. Yes, they're different, yes, I'm different, but so what!

A Note on Style and Format

A number of writers have attempted to distinguish individuals who are clinically 'deaf' from those who are culturally 'Deaf' by using either a lowercase or an uppercase designation. While I find this distinction conceptually useful, I have found it to be practically unworkable. Colleagues and friends found these distinctions confusing in my own drafts as well as in published materials from other authors. More importantly, there is a range of both cultural and functional deafness and the distinction between cultural and functional deafness is not clear cut. On-going concerns about membership and boundaries is an important feature of the Deaf community. I reserve the use of the capitalized 'Deaf' for Deaf culture, the Deaf community, the Deaf world and Deaf people -- when referring to a group of persons who are culturally and usually functionally deaf.

Informants' quotes are often accompanied by my own questions to them or my descriptions of their signing. My comments are bracketed: [ ]. When I quote informants who spoke in sign language, translation became both a linguistic and artistic challenge. Authors have responded to this challenge differently. Some writers have used a more literal translation from sign language to spoken language. While this method conveys the sense of difference between sign and spoken language, it often creates a false impression of sign language as an ungrammatical or disjointed language. Many writers have used variations on the more traditional approach to translation by treating sign language as any other spoken language and have given conceptual equivalents in grammatical English. A few authors such as Sidransky (1990) have experimented with a more figurative style which attempts to convey the distinct visual and metaphoric richness of sign language while approximating English grammatical order. Because informants themselves used varying forms of sign language during the interviews -- including some who gestured, others who were fluent in sign language, and others who spoke and signed at the same time -- I have attempted to reflect this diversity in my translations.

Finally, because much of this data has not been statistically analyzed but mostly because I am chilled and unconvinced by numerical reports, I generally use quantitative descriptors rather than precise numerical figures when referring to informants: e.g., several, many, most, etc. However, I have attempted to use these terms consistently throughout this dissertation. I find that these approximations provide a more realistic range of informant responses and experiences and mirror the fluidity and imprecision which exists in people's lives. Table A shows the approximate numerical correlations that I intend when using these descriptive terms.

Table A. Numerical Approximations of Terms Used

Term	Approximate Equivalent (Out of 150)*
A few	3-9
Several	10-39
A number of	40-75
More than Half	76-99
Many	100+
Most	125+
Almost all	140+
Rare(ly)	<3
Infrequent(ly)	<25
Frequently/Common(ly)	>125

*Refers to the 150 informants.

Chapter 1: Reprise

Deaf people are no longer the invisible minority they once were. Deaf characters appear on soap operas and Star Trek. A deaf woman wins an Oscar for Best Actress. Interpreters for the deaf appear encapsulated in floating bubbles on the tv screen. Phone companies levy a small tax on customers for something mysteriously called "TTD Services for the Deaf." TV Guide notes which television programs are "closed-captioned for the deaf." A Colgate commercial features a classroom of deaf children. Sign language classes flourish. Although deaf people have become more visible, how well understood are they? What of the day-to-day lives of deaf people? Media and technology mask significant cultural differences which affect how deaf people see themselves and see others who are not deaf.

These informants provide a window of opportunity, a time when the hearing world and the deaf world came closest together. Unlike most of their grandparents and parents, these informants were raised within a deaf family and often within a larger Deaf community. Yet, unlike most of their parents, they also had access to the hearing world. Their lives encompass unique features with regard to language, the family and cultural transmission. Although not all of these men and women were interpreters for their parents, informants were interpreters in another sense. Most actively considered the relationship of their parents' deafness to their present adult lives. Many even considered how they as a group were affected. Informants would propose various hypotheses to me: "Are more of us left-handed?" "I think that children of deaf parents are more insecure." "Do we have a higher divorce rate?" "I think we're more sensitive to difference." While many of these premises were not substantiated for the group as a whole, they highlight an important feature that informants did share: that their experiences meant something. As David got up to leave, he shook his head:

> So, my parents are deaf. And, I'm hearing. I grew up with deaf people. People looked at me and made fun of me and just like they made fun of them. I always felt a part of the Deaf world. When I started working with the deaf, it really seemed right. Then some deaf people would tell me I wasn't deaf, I was hearing. So I asked my father and mother and they said, Oh, You're deaf. And some deaf people keep telling me I'm not. I don't know. Deaf, Hearing. Hearing, Deaf. This world, that world, in-between. There must be a reason for all this. There just must be. It's got to mean something.

SECTION II: FAMILY ALBUMS

Introduction to Section II: Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5

Sarah's Story:

My father was born deaf to deaf parents. So there was a lot of pride in being deaf. My mother was born hearing to hearing parents. She became deaf at an early age. My mother always wished she could be hearing again. And my grandparents wished she could be hearing. When I was growing up, my grandfather -- who was well into his 80's at that time -- was still sending hearing aid salesmen to our door, even though my mother hadn't heard a thing since she was 5 years old. My mother would calmly send the salesman away. And my grandfather would still cry because his daughter couldn't hear.

I was the first grandchild on both sides of the family. So I was really this wonderful happening -- sort of. On my father's side, I think everybody, not my parents, but my grandparents I think would have regarded me much higher if I had been born deaf. They would have valued me more if I had been born deaf.

On my mother's side, when my mother married my father, her parents told her, "Don't you ever have a child. Stop it right here, don't have a child!" When my mother got pregnant, my grandmother wouldn't speak to my father. Then, when my mother got pregnant with my brother a year and a half later, my parents were not spoken to at all for daring to chance having a deaf child.

When I was born, it was like the miracle of the ages. I know that my grandmother on my mother's side saw me as her second chance. As the golden baby doll girl that could do no wrong, that could have anything she wanted. I could have anything I wanted if I asked it the right way and wore my little white blouse like she wanted, say the right things, do the right things.

My grandmother had a beautiful diamond wedding ring, my maternal hearing grandmother. She would show me her ring, and she kept saying, "Sarah, this is yours! This ring is yours." And my mother put up with years and years of being skipped over. When my grandmother died, we were all at the funeral home. The entire family knew that ring was mine. So, they brought the ring to me in a little manila envelope and tried to put it in my hand. And I looked down the aisle at my mother. She was watching everything, and she knew. She knew that ring was always meant to be mine. And I said to my uncle, "Please, take this ring. Give it to my mother." But, he tried to argue with me. He shook his head and said, "Your grandmother wanted you to have this. This is your ring." I looked at him and I said, "No, not yet." I took the ring and [cries and signs, gave it to my mother.] And she held it so tightly.

About five years ago my mother gave me the ring. She laughed and said, "I don't want to die for you to have this ring." I don't allow myself to think about the pain my mother must have felt about that ring. And how did she feel about my grandmother who thought that I was the end of all miracles? This woman who was her own mother?

Like the other men and women in this study, Sarah's story draws from memories and perspectives over several generations. Grandparents, parents, and children -- each contribute to their family narratives. The task of separating out and isolating informants' stories from those of their families is illusory at best. Their narratives are inextricably embedded in a family tapestry which, like all histories, is neither stagnant, nor complete, nor resolved. And, these perspectives are inherently biased. In all but thirteen interviews, one informant provides an undisputed version of their family history.[1] Yet, this dissertation is not an attempt to render a complete and accurate family portrait. Instead, it places one family perspective at center stage: that of hearing

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[1] Five pairs of siblings were interviewed; in one case, three siblings from one family were interviewed.

children of deaf parents. By their very selectivity and bias, informants reveal central beliefs about themselves and their family heritage. As Shengold (1989) observes: "there was a past, however imperfectly we have registered it and however impossible it is for us to communicate it or recapture it completely" (p. 32). Informants' family narratives form not only the basis for an ethnography of hearing children of deaf parents, they provide a framework in which their adult identity is given shape and meaning.

Although interpretations and outcomes differ from family to family, many of the milestones and features of informants' lives are remarkably similar. Homans (1961) described studies of social behavior as moments frozen in time. Snapshots. Section II is organized around principal characters within informants' lives. Parents, grandparents, family friends and siblings. These portraits are an amalgam of childhood recollections and present adult interactions. Informants selectively open their family albums, dwelling on certain memories, passing over others. The emphasis here, as it is throughout this dissertation, is on informants' narratives of self: their perceptions of their experiences and how this history informs their present adult identity.

SECTION II: FAMILY ALBUMS

CHAPTER 2: Mother Father Deaf

Introduction to Chapter 2

> There are times when I get so filled with rage, helplessness, I don't know, all these feelings. Like when I'd be talking to someone about my parents. But I couldn't make them understand or maybe they refused to understand. I felt like I was throwing my parents to the wolves. I'm thinking about my neighbors and my friends. I didn't realize until now, but I sort of hate them. I hate them because they don't care enough to ask me. [Starts to cry.] It just means so much to me when somebody cares enough to ask me, you know, what it's about. To get past saying how neat sign language is, or aren't your parents sweet. Not many people do that. It's so different from their lives. My life, my parents, it's all so far away from hearing people. And my neighbors and friends, I feel like, I really do, I feel like, fuck 'em!

Most informants shared similar feelings of frustration and anger at trying to or even needing to explain. Explain about deafness, explain about their parents, explain about themselves. How deaf people can drive, or deaf people can read. How deaf people can have hearing children, or that their hearing children learn to talk. As one informant noted, "Sometimes I just don't bring it up -- I get tired of explaining." Several informants echoed one woman who agreed to be interviewed only after learning that my parents were also deaf: "I wasn't going to do it [the interview] because I always get asked so many dumb questions. It's a lot better knowing that you understand, that I don't have to explain everything." A life-time of explaining. Given this opportunity to talk about their lives without the burden of explanation, what did informants talk about? Their deaf parents.

Informants talked at length about their parents. This was partly the result of informants' narrative style: a temporal progression of family history from past to present. Talking about their deaf parents also reflected a stated focus of this study. Yet, the emphasis was unmistakable: the intensity and the drama of their parents' stories frequently overshadowed their own. Even in the most unstructured interviews ("Tell me about yourself"), informants generally followed a familiar pattern: they began by telling me about their parents. I found myself entranced with stories of their deaf parents. Mothers and fathers who were tenacious, ingenious, vibrant. Mothers and fathers who tangled with oppression, negation and failure. Often I had to remind myself and the informant that I was primarily interested in them, not their parents. In group gatherings as well, when adult hearing children would meet for the first time many would introduce themselves by describing their mothers and fathers: where their parents were from, which schools they went to, which organizations they are belonged to.

The intense presence of informants' unseen parents underscores a significant dilemma for hearing children of deaf parents. Much of their identity is highly associated with one equation: their parents are deaf; they are hearing. This identity is a tenuous balance, counterpoised to both being deaf as well as to adult status. The implications of this life-long heritage are threaded throughout this dissertation. This chapter considers those who are undoubtedly *the* central family members for most informants: their parents. Yet, this exploration is not primarily concerned with a deaf mother's history or a deaf father's character. Here, the discussion concerns their (adult) hearing child: how descriptions about their parents reflects informants' own issues of identity and cultural affiliation. From informants' narratives about their parents, four themes will be examined: what it means to be deaf; accountability; the hearing child's role as protector and advocate; and, finally, a paradigm of similarity and difference. Each of these features recurred throughout most informants' narratives; for a number of men and women, they were a dominant theme and a central issue of identity.

Just Deaf

After nearly four hours, I was preparing to leave Jim's house; Jim was my 67th informant. We had spent an evening discussing a wide range of topics. I remember feeling confident that his family experiences fell well within the parameters of my planned ethnography. Among my informants, Jim's life was nothing out of the ordinary. Both of his parents were deaf, went to residential schools, socialized almost exclusively with other deaf people. Jim shared stories of his childhood, his feelings of difference, of communication and cultural conflict. As I thanked him for his time, the phone rang. He answered it and began talking. Jim momentarily turned aside and said, "It's my father." I was dumbfounded.

Using the telephone is increasingly commonplace for the Deaf. Deaf people now use teletype machines, interpreters and relay services to converse. Yet, Jim's father used none of these. He spoke with his own voice. He heard with only minor amplification. Despite his understandable speech and his ability to hear, Jim's father identified himself as a <u>deaf</u> person. Jim's own family experiences were little different than other informants whose parents were profoundly deaf.

In addition to the specific cause of deafness, two additional variables are frequently identified in determining the impact and outcomes of deafness: the degree of hearing loss and the age of onset.[1] Both markers are based on cultural assumptions: that it is the ability to hear a human voice which determines the ultimate severity of the loss, that acquisition of language means acquiring a spoken language. These two assumptions reflect an often unequivocal standard of hearing and speaking against which a child must perform or fail. Yet, a generation later, informants question the

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[1] These two synergistic factors are often used to assess a deaf child's educational and audiological needs. Profound hearing loss usually begins at 80-90 dB -- a threshold which eliminates most of the range of a human voice. The degree of loss is compounded by the age at which it happened. The most commonly used age-thresholds are 'prelingual,' 'postlingual' and 'prevocational' deafness.

rigidity and the significance of hearing loss and age of onset. A few informants felt that if circumstances had been different, their parent would have functioned as a hearing person. Most informants, however, described how much of their parents' childhood had been lost trying to make them hear and speak.

A unifying feature throughout almost all informants' descriptions was how their parents' degree of hearing loss or age of onset made little difference in how their parents were treated as children, how they functioned as adults, or in their overall identity as Deaf. No informant used the term 'hearing-impaired' and only three consistently used the term 'hard-of-hearing' to describe a deaf parent -- even though several informants mentioned that their parent(s) actually could hear or speak better than most deaf people.[2] Sam explained:

> Well, when people ask, I tell them that my parents are deaf. I don't tell them, oh, you know, that my father can hear a little bit or that my mother has a 100 db loss in both ears. They're both just deaf!

Being "deaf" not only includes a wide range of hearing and/or speaking abilities; being "deaf" also demands certain attitudes and social obligations. Informants described the importance of coming to terms with one's deafness. These

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[2] When asked about the hearing or deaf status of their parents, 9 informants identified one parent as "hard-of-hearing." Yet, transcripts show that 6 of the 9 more frequently used the term "deaf" when referring to that parent.

women and men generally evaluated their parents' feelings about being deaf both by their personal attitude (whether they were ashamed or bitter, or not) as well as in terms of how much the parent interacted with other deaf people. Barbara compared her mother with her father:

> She never really accepted it [being deaf]...not like my Dad. I guess it has something to do with her parents not accepting it. She would always sign small in public, or not at all. She didn't want anybody to know. To see her different from them. She almost never went to the deaf club. My Dad was there all the time. A lot of the time he just went by himself. But, he does just fine. He's proud of being deaf.

The expression [sign 'strongly deaf'][3] was used by several informants when describing a parent (or other deaf acquaintance) who had a positive, often activist stance about being deaf.

From descriptions about their deaf parents, two interrelated perspectives emerge: 1) one can be "deaf" regardless of hearing or speaking abilities, and 2) being deaf ideally includes an attitude of self-acceptance and social

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[3] Two signs are used to express this: 'strong' + 'deaf.' A related expression can be found in an alternative sign for 'deaf.' In ordinary usage, the sign for 'deaf' is made by touching the index finger to the ear and mouth. An alternative sign begins with the index finger at the ear, but shifts to the sign for 'closed' (made with both hands and often with more dramatic flourish). This latter sign indicates someone who is profoundly deaf and/or strongly identified as deaf.

interaction with other deaf people.[4] The evaluative nature of being "deaf" is an important feature which relates to informants' own identity: a sense of being "deaf" or "hearing" which is not exclusively dependent on one's functional ability or loss. And, because being deaf includes the social expectation of associating with other deaf people, it creates a tension between finding refuge in a group like oneself and setting oneself apart as a distinct individual.[5]

Accountability

It is important to distinguish between the more generalized features of Deaf culture and the immediate family experiences of these informants. Although the Deaf community was routinely part of more than half of all informants' childhood experience (see Chapter 4), most informants' sense of deafness and of deaf culture was substantially informed by their parents. Informants describe a highly personal sense of deafness -- despite situations and environments which were frequently parallel to other informants. As children, many

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[4] Two signs illustrate the subjective nature of being deaf or hearing. 1) A pejorative sign for someone who thinks like a hearing person: [the sign for 'hearing,' ordinarily placed on the mouth, is placed on the forehead]. 2) A favorable sign for someone who feels like a deaf person: [the sign for 'deaf,' ordinarily placed at the ear, is placed over the heart.

[5] Goffman (1963) describes the dilemma of "embracing one's stigma": finding comfort and strength by belonging to a group of others like yourself, but losing your own individuality.

informants felt their situation was unique -- even if they had other hearing siblings or knew other hearing children of deaf parents.

Within a contemporary milieu in which intimate family environments are openly discussed, several adult informants wondered at their own lack of questioning. Ilene shook her head as she wondered why she never talked about this with her own siblings or other hearing children of deaf parents: "You'd think we would've talked about all this, but we never did...It never occurred to me." A number of informants reported that only as adults were they motivated to examine their experiences, to learn about deafness, or to talk with other hearing children of deaf parents. Gloria explained:

> When we were at the deaf club, or when it was just me and my sister, we didn't need to talk about our deaf parents. I mean, that's just the way it was. And, we certainly didn't want to talk about it with hearing people. They were the ones who kept making us feel different.

Like many other informants, Gloria conveyed both her intrinsic sense of her family as normal and her desire to exclude external suggestions of negative difference. Among adult informants, it was often a change in their anticipated life course (e.g., divorce, career change, death of a loved one) which prompted them to reconsider their lives. In keeping with contemporary cultural values which strongly correlate adult outcomes with childhood environment, adult hearing children began questioning their own family experiences.

Yet, without adequate comparisons or a sense of shared history, many informants struggled to evaluate the impact of their parents' deafness on their life. Five different informants used identical words to describe this quandary: "I don't know what's the deafness and what isn't." Yet, informants often disagreed over whether it was possible or even worthwhile to separate out "what was the deafness and what wasn't." Several informants told me they were interested in this research because they hoped for answers to their own life questions. For almost all these men and women, it was not whether having deaf parents made any difference in one's life. It was a matter of defining and evaluating these differences. Informants described a personal version of the nature-nurture controversy: Were the benefits or disadvantages of growing up with deaf parents primarily dependent on the personalities of their parents, or were there features intrinsic to being deaf or being hearing? Who is accountable for those childhood experiences which some informants judged to be difficult or even harmful? Their deaf parents? Their grandparents? Hearing people? Are such outcomes simply unavoidable in the clash between two distinct cultures?

For many informants, it was their family's economic situation rather than their parents' deafness which contributed the greatest family hardships.[6] Despite considerable variation in the economic status of their

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[6] Greenberg (1970) beautifully illustrates the synergy of poverty and deafness in her compelling and insightful novel <u>In This Sign</u>.

grandparents, informants' deaf parents earned their livelihoods within a much narrower income bracket (see Table N in Appendix A). Deafness -- like many disabilities -- proved to be a great economic leveler. Upon completion of school, many deaf parents confronted a society which emphasized their difference and overlooked their marketable skills. Informants reported their parents were frequently underemployed. Although deaf people have more recently had increased career options, job opportunities were historically limited for many deaf parents. Even when hired, job security was often tenuous, promotion virtually non-existent. Martin describes his father:

> My Dad was a carpenter. He travelled a lot. He always told he didn't feel like he could change jobs. I had a hearing uncle who was also a carpenter, but he wouldn't work anywhere except within a small radius from his home. So he could be home at night. He could change companies if a job was finished, he could go work for some other company that had a job nearby. My Dad felt as a deaf person he didn't have that option. Once you go to a new company, you've got to sell yourself all over again. So he got with this company that was very good to him and he followed them wherever they went with a job. He would go to Kentucky for a while, then he went to Virginia. Once in a while he would be close to home. Most of the time he was all over the Southeast. He could only come home maybe every two weeks or sometimes once a month. For two days or so. So we didn't see much of him as I was a teenager...He always worked for an hourly wage. He never did get into the supervisory position where he would have gotten a guaranteed salary. He would have definitely gotten that if he had been with a company that long as a hearing person.

Martin's narrative reveals a tenuous balance of acknowledging the social inequities his father confronted, and admitting the negative impact of his father's absence. While conceding that his father probably had little choice to change the situation, Martin later stressed that one of the most important changes he made with regard to his own children was "not being an absent father."

Lack of choices, social oppression, and communication barriers were among the frequent reasons given for why most informants did not hold their deaf parents accountable for whatever childhood or adult difficulties they experienced. Overall, whether because of their parents' economic limitations, social oppression, or their parents' families of origin, informants were least likely to find their own parents at fault. Edward explained his philosophy about deafness:

> It's like deafness created certain kinds of situations that wouldn't be there otherwise. It changes the family dynamics. But, it's not like the deafness itself caused this or caused that. It's what people do, how they react to being deaf that makes the difference.

Edward's explanation also reveals a strong loyalty to his parents. Like most informants, Edward identified with his parents -- despite their functional differences. As Angelique pointed out in the Introduction:

> It doesn't really make that much difference that my mother is deaf...My mother is deaf, but she's also my mother.

A Legacy of Protection and Advocacy

The Introduction to the dissertation opens with Peter describing how rich his life has been made by his deaf parents. After our interview, Peter drove me to the area where he grew up and, with justifiable pride, he pointed to the house his father had built by hand many years ago. His hand swept across a large brick house surrounded by acres of rolling pastures and he shook his head. "People would never think a deaf man could do that." Months later and more than a thousand miles away, when I first sat down with Della, she began telling me a story of when she was eight years old. Della described a May Day celebration when her mother had sewn dresses and vests for every girl and boy in Della's grade school class. Della looked straight at me and said, "That's the kind of thing that people need to know about our parents. They need to get beyond this idea of deaf people as helpless and broken." Her words echoed strongly felt descriptions from an overwhelming majority of informants who shared similar vignettes about their parents.

Although almost all informants acknowledged some difficulties in their families, in retrospect most felt these problems were comparable to other families. Yet, as children and as adults, informants remained concerned about public reaction and interpretation. During our interview, Louise leaned toward me and said:

> You think I'd tell anyone that there were problems? Can you imagine what they would say? 'Oh, it must be because your parents are deaf.' It doesn't matter that other families have problems too. What family doesn't have problems? But, if my family had problems, then it's all because my parents are deaf.

Another young man exhorted, "There's so much negative stuff out there about deaf people. We have to fight back." As a listener but also an insider, I was often pressed to pursue a role of advocacy in my research. How does this legacy affect informants' adult identity?

Goffman (1963) and others described various ways discredited persons manage information and situations in order to control the impact of stigma. (See Chapter 8 for a broader discussion of stigma). While stigma management may have been important for both deaf parents and their hearing children, hearing children have access to the speaking world. Speaking provided them with opportunities to promote their parents' normalcy or confront negative criticism.

> I would see these people staring at us. Making comments about us. I just wanted to run over to their table and say, 'What the fuck you looking at?' I don't know these people! What do they want from us?

Yet, this method of advocacy underscored informants' ambiguous identity. By using spoken words, informants identified themselves as hearing -- simultaneously underscoring their parents' difference from other people and their own difference from their parents. Those informants who overheard negative remarks but chose not to respond were left with a different predicament. Barbara explained: "I never knew if I should tell them [parents] what I heard. I usually didn't. I figured it would just hurt them." Others, like Richard, reported that even when they told their parents what others were saying,

> He [father] just told me to ignore it. Well, I guess that's probably the best thing, but still, he wasn't the one who had to keep hearing all that. I did. And I'd get really pissed off!

Whether responding or not responding to outsiders, informants were caught within a web of difference -- different from hearing people because they appeared deaf, different from their deaf parents because they could speak and hear.

Informants described a style of stigma management which often portrayed their deaf parents as very much like hearing people. A number of informants, however, confessed that they "weren't always sure how hearing parents behaved." In their attempts to normalize their parents, informants frequently created a veil of deafness which downplayed negative features as well as diminished culturally distinct aspects of deafness. Informants cited numerous occasions in which they altered their parents' words or disguised their actions in order to create a positive impression or avoid unpleasantries. This childhood censorship was often remembered with humor. Don was typical:

> One time he [father] was just furious at this [store] clerk. My Dad told me to tell the guy to shove it up his ass! I remember saying something like, "Well, my father doesn't think this is a good idea."

Informants saw these alterations as necessary to offset prevalent negative stereotypes of deaf people. Deaf parents, too, often minimized their differences from hearing people (by not signing, by mouthing words, by nodding even though not understanding), as well as by stressing only positive aspects or outcomes of being deaf.[7] However, whether by parents or by children, these modifications created a distorted sense of deaf people -- not only to outsiders but to insiders as well. Denise, in describing how she protected her family from stigma, reveals how she also sacrificed a fuller understanding of her parents:

> I really worked at it [signs 'vague; cover-up']. You know, not letting others see them being deaf. I mean, people knew that they couldn't hear. But I never let anyone see that they were different. It's like I washed them out. And now all I have is this faded idea of what being deaf is all about.

While most informants felt that some degree of advocacy and protectiveness was inevitable, many questioned whether these responsibilities were appropriate for children. Shaking her head, Margaret evaluated her childhood experiences:

> They tried their best. And they did a lot for me, they really did. But, sometimes now I think, who was looking out for me, who was protecting me?

Margaret's words echo Richard (p. 3): "And who's supposed to take care of me?" Their concern reflects a popular sentiment within American culture: the family responsibility of protection is immutably that of the parent (Demos 1986). One

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[7] Davis (1961) describes similar interactions between persons with other types of disabilities and those not disabled.

fundamental tenet among the multitude of Adult Children groups[8] cites the failure of parents to let children be children -- which includes burdening children with too much responsibility and not sufficiently protecting them (Black 1982; Woodside 1982; Gravitz and Bowden 1985; Brown 1988; Elkind 1988). These popular values create another dilemma of identity for adult hearing children: either to accept the norms of the broader (hearing) culture which conflict with their deaf family way of life, or to align themselves with their deaf parents and remain outside mainstream culture.

Most informants balanced any sense of compromised childhoods with the ultimate benefits of such experiences -- including being more mature, being more sensitive to others, and having a greater variety of life experiences. Others, like Mark, suggested the cultural relativity of their childhood responsibilities:

> Sure, I had to do things that other kids didn't have to do. It was part of my role. But that was then. I don't do it now. You do what you have to do in the situation. I don't have any hard feelings about it. I might if I still had to do it now, but I don't.

Attempts to resolve the contradictions between their deaf family experiences and how the hearing culture interpreted

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[8] The adult child may be characterized as an incomplete synthesis -- an adult whose present identity is indelibly linked and explained by his or her family experiences as a child. This linkage is more often problematic, as threads of childhood memories and roles preclude or conflict with the assumption of adult identity. The child's successful socialization has been mitigated by parents who are unwilling or unable to adhere to familial standards within their sociocultural group.

those experiences were evident even in extreme cases such as those few informants who described abusive childhoods. Although Ella described her father as a violent-tempered man who showed little affection, she also pointed out reasons for his behavior:

> A lot of other people would say, Well, he's just terrible, he's evil! But, what kind of upbringing did he have? I mean, where was the love and support he should have had? If he didn't learn it or have it, how could he give it to me?

Most informants continued to be advocates for their parents as adults -- whether in more direct roles on behalf of their parents, in careers related to deaf people, or merely in day-to-day interactions with friends and acquaintances. These adult responsibilities often renewed issues of identity and alignment, further complicated by a growing militancy within many Deaf communities. Deaf people have increasingly rejected hearing people as spokespersons. But, what of their own children: Are they hearing or deaf?

This legacy of protection and advocacy has four general implications for the identity of adult informants. First, the role of advocate and protector situates informants between hearing people and their deaf parents, underscoring their difference from hearing people _and_ from deaf people. This increased their sense of uniqueness as well as their sense of isolation from others. Second, whether by the hearing child or the deaf parents, stigma management which emphasizes how much deaf people are like hearing people precluded an acknowledgement of difference. This frequently discouraged discussion of family concerns or issues with others (even others like themselves) and ultimately diminished the sense of Deaf culture and identity. Third, informants' childhood responsibilities of protection and advocacy were in conflict with contemporary cultural values which interpret such family systems as dysfunctional and damaging to the child. Informants faced the dilemma of either aligning themselves with the larger Hearing culture or aligning themselves with their deaf parents. Finally, these informants' ensconced childhood role as advocates on behalf of their deaf parents persisted into adulthood. Such positions potentially conflicted with the increasing militancy and self-advocacy among many Deaf people.

Similarity and Difference

An evaluation of one's similarity or difference to others is a recurrent theme which underlies many informants' family life and their own identity. Informants' ambiguous identity within a dichotomized environment will be explored in Chapter 9, which examines the segregation between the deaf and hearing worlds. However, without a keenly felt need to belong or to evaluate one's similarity to (or difference from) others, the motivation to choose among these polarized worlds would be lacking. Although comparisons and contrasts to others are standard features of identity development among most people, they were especially salient for these women and men whose parents were deaf. This section focuses on the question of marriage partners[9] among informants and among their parents. Options and choices of marriage partners has long been regarded as a significant indicator of cultural values, ethnic boundaries, and social structures (Alba 1990). As reflected in informants' discussion of marriage options for their parents and for themselves, perceptions of similarity or difference to others creates a powerful paradigm within which informants search for a resolution of their own identity.

For informants' parents, historical and social factors contributed to seeking marriage partners whose backgrounds and experiences appear highly homogeneous. Schein (1974) estimates that between 85-95% of life-long deaf individuals marry another deaf individual. Within the sample population, 141 of 150 informants had two deaf parents. (This majority would have been even greater using random sampling methods, but I solicited for a sub-sample of informants with one deaf and one hearing parent.) In addition to being deaf, informants' narratives reveal their parents history as emphasizing differences from others and similarities to each other. Adult deaf social environments also maintained this tradition. Although deaf people generally prefer the company of other deaf people regardless of citizenship or racial

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[9] Marriage partners here includes legally sanctioned as well as common-law relationships between two people -- regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

differences, marriages among deaf people generally maintain racial boundaries. This was true among the sample population: out of 141 informants' with two deaf parents, 139 parents were from the same racial group. Regional, educational and age differences were often minimized between informants' parents: more than half of all informants' parents were classmates at the same residential school. Only those parents who attended a multi-state residential school or college were more likely to marry a person from another state.

Some informants described educational, status or temperamental differences between their mother and father, occasionally questioning how well matched their parents actually were:

> I can't believe my parents got together. They're both so different from each other. I mean, they're both deaf, but that's about it. Like night and day!

Yet, even among informants whose parents had difficult marriages or that ended in divorce, informants generally viewed their parents' marriage options as constrained by the need to find another deaf partner. Among the 9 informants with one deaf and one hearing parent, only 2 felt that their parents' marriage was successful. All 7 other informants felt the hearing-deaf difference contributed to their parents' marriage problems or divorce. This compares with 112 out of 141 informants with two deaf parents who felt their parents' marriage was successful.[10] Other informants with two deaf parents frequently described their parents' mutual deafness as overriding differences. For example, although Barry had been explaining how mismatched his mother and father were, he conceded their common bond of deafness united them against a confusing and sometimes hostile environment:

> It's a wonder they're together. But, you know, when I go back home now, I see how their deafness has pulled them together. With so much to deal with, they help each other out, in different ways. It's like fighting a common enemy.

The barometer of similarity continued to be an important measure of informants' present relationships including marriage partners.[11] Many informants felt that a critical feature in their present or potential life partner was his or her similarity to themselves. Yet, the issue of similarity raises a fundamental question: similar to whom? Few informants saw marriage to a deaf person as a viable option.[12] The majority of informants remembered one or both of their parents cautioning them against marrying a deaf

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[10] Out of 141 informants with two deaf parents, only 6 parents had divorced (4.3%). Out of 9 informants with one deaf and one hearing parent, 6 parents had divorced (67.0%).

[11] Alba (1990) states that "Because of the intimacy of marriage and its implications for family networks and children, it remains a sensitive device for detecting ethnic boundaries, or social boundaries of any sort" (p. 291).

[12] Of the 112 informants who are currently or have ever been married, only 4 are/were married to a deaf person. See Table E, Appendix A.

person. Many informants reported that they themselves never even considered dating a deaf person.[13] Yet, informants frequently saw themselves as more like deaf people than hearing people. Michelle explained her options:

> I would never marry a deaf man. My God! Can you imagine? It would never work out...Well, I guess some day I'll marry some hearing guy, but I'm not sure. I don't think I have much in common with hearing people. I don't know where that leaves me. Who knows?

Michelle's concern with finding a partner epitomizes the dilemma of identity for informants. A few informants felt that the ultimate solution would be to find someone very much like themselves: someone who also had deaf parents. Tom used a description which emphasized balance in explaining his feelings:

> It's like I had too much difference in my life. Like all I ever knew was how it felt to be different. So, now, I'm starved to be like other people. I don't want to be different any more.

A few informants insisted that their experiences and their lives were no different than any one else's. Karen argued:

> My life was just like any other kid's. Just because my parents were deaf didn't make any difference. I'm just like anybody else.

Yet, Karen's assertions of similarity are tinged with concerns of difference. The concern with similarity or difference to others remains a salient and pervasive template within which

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[13] The most frequently mentioned reasons informants gave for not marrying a deaf person were: anticipated communication difficulties between partners; each partner would belong to very separate cultures/worlds; and not wanting to repeat childhood roles of interpreting or caretaking.

informants develop and construct their image of themselves.

Chapter 2: Summary

As informants remembered and described their parents, they repeatedly stressed the inherent normalcy they felt about their parents and about deafness. Parent and deaf: indelibly linked and carefully separated.

> My parents love me because I'm their son, not because I'm hearing or deaf.
>
> We fight because he's my father, not because he's deaf.
>
> Whenever I think of my mother, I remember her eyes. She had these wonderful clear eyes that were always glistening and watching everything. She could catch two conversations at once.
>
> My father had these gnarled old worker hands. And when he talked, his signing was kind of stiff and rugged, just like me. [Laughs.] And I never realized it until a few years ago when someone said, "You know, you sign just like your father."

This chapter is not about the normalization of a handicapped parent. It is about the emergence of a cultural reality. It is a vision of deafness as viable, as normal and sometimes as preferrable. It is a version of deafness not understood as functional limitation but as a way of life. Yet, such a stance is continually eroded by a hearing majority who define not only standards of communication but expressions of Family. Deaf parents raise significant issues about communication and family responsibilities: How can that helpless deaf child grow to nurture and raise a family of his or her own? How can a mother sing lullabies to her infant if she cannot hear? How can a father protect his child when he cannot speak out? From within their family experiences, informants have the resources and the motivation to challenge such assumptions.

Yet, the wages of advocacy come at a cost. In crusading for those those who are deaf, informants often must point out the oppression by those who speak and hear. Baroe (1975) asks, "Is it inevitable in social life that a sense of moral value can be secured by individuals or groups only at the expense of others?" (p. 188). Because they are hearing, these informants can be both advocate and oppressor. This paradox continues to unfold as part of their own adult identity and cultural alignment. Can one be hearing and still be (culturally) Deaf? The expected developmental processes of separation and individuation may create a separate Hearing identity apart from family and deafness, but relinquish a cultural one. Yet, connected to their parents, they remain a child-adult in the eyes of the cultural majority. In these descriptions, there is sometimes a feeling of parents who were almost too powerful. In their family histories, informants have become shadows of their parents. It is a paradoxical legacy for these hearing children of deaf parents. Parents who were invisible within their own families and society have now passed on the mantle of invisibility to their own children.

SECTION II: FAMILY ALBUMS

CHAPTER 3: Views from the Other Side: Grandparents and Relatives

Introduction to Chapter 3

Sometimes with tears, sometimes with rage, among informants most emotional and often unsettled themes were their feelings toward their grandparents. Many informants had at least some direct contact with one or more grandparents. As often, however, informants had to piece together the lives of phantom grandparents -- lost through death or family dissolution. Sarah's story (p. 49-51) was one of many informant stories about grandparents infused with anger and sadness. Only a few informants expressed feelings of gratitude. As a whole, informants shared many similar childhood experiences and issues of adult identity. Yet, one striking difference in the tenor and the drama of informants' narratives was between those informants with hearing grandparents and those with deaf grandparents.[1] Here, their family narratives take separate turns. As Sarah's story illustrates, informants' heritage from their hearing and from deaf grandparents were very different. Family narratives of informants with hearing grandparents often reached a dramatic crescendo as they herald the arrival of deafness, a time of

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[1] Of the total 288 deaf mothers or fathers of informants, 260 (90.3%) were born to hearing parents, 3 (1.0%) were born to one hearing and one deaf parent, and 25 (8.7%) were born to two deaf parents.

upheaval when their family histories were changed forever. In contrast, the narratives of informants with deaf grandparents portray a more routine sense of deafness, paradoxically underscoring that being hearing was what was considered different.

This chapter examines the separate issues which develop within the narratives of informants with hearing grandparents and those with deaf grandparents and other deaf relatives. A third section deals with family gatherings of deaf and hearing relatives -- occasions in which informants keenly felt their divided heritage.

Hearing Grandparents

The vast majority of informants' grandparents were hearing. In only three cases were all four grandparents deaf. Like Sarah, several informants had both hearing and deaf grandparents.[2] For most informants, the critical moment of transformation in their family history occured between grandparents and parents -- a time when deafness came from unknown regions to become a permanent fixture within the family legacy. Although Sarah has both hearing and deaf grandparents, she poignantly expresses the disruption and the sense of loss through her hearing grandparents. Through depictions of their hearing grandparents, informants capture

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[2] See Table I, 'Grandparents' Hearing/Deaf Status,'in Appendix A.

a sense of the often inseparable rift between the world of the deaf and the world of the hearing. Here, informants' family perspectives became the most divided: their grandparents' sense of loss and bewilderment over this non-hearing child; their parents' frustration and isolation within a family of ghosts.

As their narratives turn to that moment of change -- the origin of their parents' deafness -- informants pieced together conflicting meanings of deafness from their parents and their grandparents. Whether the causes of deafness were known or unknown, imbedded in each family's explanation were historical and cultural beliefs about hearing people, about deaf people and about families.[3] Although public reactions to their deaf parents were also an important part of informants' childhood experiences (see Chapter 8), their parents' families of origin provided the first critical arena in which the meaning of deafness was explored. Informants frequently cited their parents' families of origin as the single-most important factor which affected their parents and, ultimately, themselves. For many informants, the interactions and reactions between their grandparents and their parents tested the bonds and the meaning of family. Martin linked his grandmother's devastation to wider sociocultural beliefs and

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[3] Informants identified the causes of their parents deafness as follows: unknown or uncertain (124); born deaf [unspecified] (52); spinal meningitis (47); German measles (22); scarlet fever (13); genetic (13); an accident (10); and miscellaneous (7).

attitudes:

> My mother's relationship with her mother was really impacted by the deafness. My grandmother was uneducated. I think maybe she went through second or third grade in school. She didn't have a whole lot of ways of dealing with that. The old folks in those days thought this maybe was a punishment from God or whatever. They didn't give a whole lot of thought to how to deal with a handicapped child. One that couldn't talk was even more handicapped than anything else. It was like she didn't have much in her head.

Through their grandparents' reactions to their deaf child, informants often learned a version of deafness which equated it with loss, with the condition which caused it:

> Daddy was real sick then. They thought he was going to die. And one time I heard my grandma say that she thought maybe it would have been better if he died. That being deaf is like being sick your whole life.

The perfect child, the hearing child became the broken child. Illness, accident, defect -- all became synonyms for deafness. This time of change was stressful for the hearing family, and isolating for the child:

> My father had spinal meningitis when he was 6 or 7. He's not sure how old. He was in quarantine for anywhere from 6 months to 2 years. He was put into a hospital and not allowed to see his parents or anything. He remembers looking out the window and seeing his father looking in the window at him and waving at him. He remembers his aunt being in the bed next to him, and then waking up again and she was gone. Finding out later that she had passed away because of spinal meningitis. And immediately after being in the hospital and being quarantined, he was taken to the state school for the deaf. So he thought he was just removed from the family, gotten rid of.

Although most informants distanced themselves from feelings of grief or rejection over deafness, many accepted their grandparents' initial feelings of confusion. Eva -- while generally critical of her grandparents -- empathized with their situation. When asked what her grandparents or any hearing parents who have a deaf child could do, Eva shook her head:

> God, I feel bad for them! I really do. Because I think it's so hard. You get so many second opinions and different options. I know they're inundated with all this information and how do you know what to do? God! I keep thinking what would I do if I had a deaf child. This is awful! I'm just not sure. Giving your child a language is really important because that's how you're going to communicate with them. Whatever that may be. Beyond that, it gets really hard!

Other informants like Louis described grandparents who altogether divorced themselves from any responsibility for their child's deafness, and, ultimately, any connection to their deaf child:

> My Daddy was sent off to school once they found out he was deaf. He never had contact with his family again, so he never knew. Never knew how come he was deaf.

This version of deafness as brokenness continued to haunt informants even as adults. Whether on a first date or when meeting potential in-laws, informants were confronted with the shadow of their possible legacy: "Will my children be deaf?" "Will my grandchildren be deaf?" These concerns persisted despite the fact that the risks of most informants having a deaf child were no greater than the general population.[4] (See Chapter 8 , pp. 248-255 for a further discussion of how informants felt about having a deaf child.)

In contrast to hearing grandparents, the circumstances of becoming deaf were often unimportant among informants' parents. When informants recalled their parents' perspectives, the causes of deafness were frequently minimized. Such descriptions were brief, tentative and sometimes dismissing:

> [Jill:] My father had meningitis. My mother, scarlet fever. [long pause.] That was all there was to it.
>
> [Dwight:] The way my mother signs it [Signs 'Fell. Finished.' Shrugs shoulders.] Like, well, one minute it was there, the next it wasn't. No big deal. Life goes on.

In comparison to their grandparents' reactions, most informants echoed their parents limited tolerance for grief or denial over being deaf -- sometimes with sympathetic chiding:

> My grandmother was just heartbroken. It was really hard for her. I think my grandfather didn't know what to do. And I could understand feeling that way at first, I guess, but it never stopped. They still feel bad. They still don't know what to do.

Sometimes with humor:

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[4] Because many informants were uncertain about the causes of their parents' deafness, it is unclear how many of them actually carried a genetic marker for deafness. However, genetically caused profound childhood deafness is mainly autosomal recessive, and determined at any one of over 100 different chromosomal loci. Most of these genetic forms of deafness are rare. The apparently few informants who did carry a specific genetic marker for deafness would have to find a partner with the exact same genetic marker in order to have a deaf child.

> My grandparents took my mother everywhere, you know, one doctor after another. Always the same thing. "She's deaf." "She can't be!" Another round, same thing. "She's deaf." "She can't be!" Thank God they ran out of money! They might still be dragging her around.

Although recognizing their grandparents' sense of loss and confusion, informants identified their grandparents' views of deafness as inalterably "hearing." Many of those interviewed revealed a sense of exasperation at their grandparents' inability to cross the line, to become like them: part-hearing, part-deaf.

A number of researchers have examined families' emotional and behavioral responses to a child with a disability.[5] Many writers describe how families negotiate personal and social expectations of normalcy with the day-to-day interactions with their child. Often, these descriptions utilize a stage-reaction format to characterize family responses -- including grief, shock, denial, acceptance.[6] Regardless of the number or sequence of stages, writers characterize the family's trajectory toward a resolution based on the reality of their child's condition. Deafness, however, presents a critical obstacle in this process. The intrinsic condition frequently prevents the communication needed to arrive at any sense of mutual understanding. Ron described his father's family:

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[5] See Glossary for definitions and distinctions between 'disability' and 'handicap.'

[6] Mori 1983; Bristor, 1984; Fortier and Wanlass 1984.

> My [paternal] grandparents still don't sign. My grandfather's passed away, never knowing how to sign. And my grandmother's still alive, and the only way they communicate is passing notes. And I kind of look down on that, and plus the way she [grandmother] talks to us. My father still doesn't know how she talks to us. She'll say, "It's really amazing how your father's kept a job, and has a house and raised fine kids." And I'm thinking, Why are you so shocked? I can't understand why they're so shocked. To me they're just as normal as anybody else. But even their own parents look at them and think it's a big deal if they can drive or walk down the street.

Deaf parents who were oral were no more likely to have better communication with their hearing parents. Whether through signing, speech, lipreading, or writing, informants considered only 37 out of a total of 288 deaf mothers and fathers able to communicate well with at least one parent. This lack of family communication usually extended to parents' siblings and other family members as well, interfering with routine family interactions and an overall sense of their own family.

The lack of communication and interaction among their parents' family of origin frequently screened out other cultural and religious heritages. Whether Catholic or Jewish, African-American or Polish, family traditions often dissipated between these generations. When I asked Polly if she felt any of her grandparents' ethnic traditions had been passed on to her, she shook her head:

> I really noticed it one day my son came home from school and had to do this project. And he wanted to know all this stuff about his grandparents and his ethnic background and all that. So we were all sitting down to eat and his father [Polly's husband] was explaining about the kind of food his family ate and what they wore. And all these sayings they had and how they acted. And my son turned to me and said, "Well, what about your family?" And I looked at him and said, "I don't know. We

> were just deaf." And the funny thing is my husband is like a third or fourth generation American. My grandparents came here off the boat.

Only a handful of informants felt that their family histories were unbroken, and this was always explained by the fact that one or more of their parents' family members could communicate with them. Nick stresed the continued significance of his grandmother's efforts:

> It wasn't easy for her [grandmother] but she tried. She knew how important it was. And I know it made a difference in how things turned out for me.

In a few instances, hearing grandparents and deaf parents developed a positive and interactive relationship. Most did not. Most never developed a way to bridge the worlds of silence and the worlds of sound. Except through the informant. Informants' were able to listen to both voices: that of their parents, that of their grandparents. Often, informants were literally interpreters between these two generations.[7] Often, they heard the anguish which neither side could express to the other.

> My grandmother sat me down one day and said, "You know, I would have given anything if your Momma could hear. We tried to get her well, but it was too late. I just can't tell her how sorry I am."

Deaf parents, too, shared their family histories with their

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[7] Interpreting between parent and grandparent did not occur among all informants. More often, this fell to the eldest or only children (see Chapter 5). Nevertheless, younger siblings frequently reported a similar sense of separation between their parent(s) and grandparents.

hearing children. Eva stopped several times before finally explaining:

> It's hard to talk about...There was just so much pain...My Dad was so separated from his family. He thinks he was rejected. He used to tell me [signs: cry every night until 11 years old.] Sometimes you just don't want to hear it, there's so much pain. Like when he tells me how frustrated he is because his Mom still can't talk to him. All she can do are the nurturing signs like 'food' and 'love.' That's it. God, I see how much hurts him!

The sense of guilt, of loss, of separation between their grandparents and their parents often persisted over the years as the informant grew from to child to adult. As repositories for their grandparents' and their parents' untold stories, informants often chose to keep this realm of sadness and anger hidden.

A number of women and men questioned how their parents could suppress or ignore these feelings:

> My father was never really angry about that, but it makes me angry. I have a hard time understanding how come my father's not really mad at all this. I guess he just counts it as experience. Huh! Some experience.

Often, it was the informant, not their parents, who confronted hearing relatives and strangers alike:

> My Dad would always tell me to just ignore it. But one time I'd had it. I just blew up and let them have it. "Who the hell do you think you are? You think because you can hear, you're special? Well let me tell you, hearing doesn't mean shit! And, my Dad is a lot more of a human being than any of you will ever be!"

As adults, many informants continued their mandate to protect their parents against the hearing world, and for many, this included their own relatives. Craig's anger erupted as he denounced his hearing relatives:

> On my Mom's side there's nine or ten brothers and sisters and we were always left out. Everybody had a motor home, everybody had money, everybody would go travelling. And we never got invited. We'd hear about it later, we'd see the pictures later...Now, my aunt invites me out to lunch and says, "Don't tell your parents, We don't want your parents to feel hurt." How on earth are they supposed to feel? It's so typical, the deaf are always left out.

Blood ties to their parents' relatives were overridden by a glaring mark of identity: they are hearing. They do not understand. They do not belong. Judith's definition of family was clear:

> So that's the kind of total fucking exclusion I feel. Not only did you [hearing relatives] do that to my father, you've also done that to me. I don't have any family. I mean, that's how I feel. I don't have a family. All I have is my brothers and my sister, and my Mom and Dad. That's all the fuck I got!

Alignment with their deaf parents was not always straightforward. Like their grandparents, informants were hearing. Many informants' descriptions portray an uneasy alliance between their grandparents and themselves. Despite earlier criticism of the way her grandparents treated her father, Olivia also felt the allure of a shared perspective:

> I used to love to just sit and listen to her [grandmother]. It was like I remembered that I could hear.

Both grandparent and grandchild looked into the world of deafness and yet both could hear. Both indelibly linked to deafness through birth. Yet, although hearing grandparents mirrored many of the issues and concerns of their hearing grandchildren, such perspectives were rarely shared. Lisa explained why she was so angry with her hearing relatives:

> At a very early age -- when I was probably 3 or 4 -- I really began to conduct business for my parents. I think that's probably typical. I really think that my grandparents and aunts and uncles were almost relieved of the burden. They passed the mantle onto me. And at the same time, they were very -- I don't know how to explain it -- they made sure they didn't share with me how difficult it was going to be. Nobody ever said, "Gee, Lisa, we had to go through this too, or how's it going?" Instead, it was always, "Make sure you take care of your parents." And that is something that I think I'm extremely resentful about. One of my aunts was in town recently and I went to dinner with her. And during the course of dinner she made a comment to me. "You know, your parents really were very different. I never knew what to do or how to communicate with them. They just see the world differently." I thought, if only somebody had said this to me thirty or forty years ago. But, nobody said anything to me when I was a kid. If somebody had said to me, "You know, we understand that your parents really don't see things the way everybody else necessarily see them." It would just have made it a lot easier.

Lisa's criticsm of her hearing relatives focuses less on sharing family responsibilities than on sharing the sense of difference. Here, her hearing relatives failed her most. They failed to acknowledge their own struggles with these two worlds, and thus failed to validate Lisa's perspective. Nor was it enough to be merely sympathetic. John explained why he resented his grandparents comments:

> They always said things like, "You poor thing with your mamma deaf." I used to hate it. Hate that tone. It was like they were feeling sorry for me, sorry for my mother. And then, you know, they never said how they felt about it either. After all, she was their daughter. They had to deal with it too!

This was not a desire to have grandparents confide to their grandchildren what they wanted to say to their deaf child.

This was a plea for a sense of shared identity between grandparent and grandchild: two generations both touched by hearing and by deafness.

Although many of the issues between deaf parent and hearing child parallel other first- and second-generation immigrant groups, stories about their hearing grandparents reveal one significant difference. Immigrant groups' gradual acculturation often alter language and customs such that grandparent is dissociated from grandchild. In those family histories, it is the parent who serves as bridge between two worlds. Among hearing children of deaf parents, however, the sequence changes. Here, it is often the grandchild who links these two generations -- one hearing, one deaf -- each belonging to lands far more separate than can be imagined.

Deaf Grandparents

Within her family history, Sarah described a different set of expectations between her hearing and her deaf grandparents. Although brief, her depiction of her deaf grandparents leaves an unequivocal impression. "My [deaf] grandparents," she said, "would have regarded me much higher if I had been born deaf. They would have valued me more if I had been born deaf." Within the narratives of those with deaf grandparents, the "different center" that Padden and Humphries (1988) describe among the Deaf community is most evident. Within these families, deafness was the norm. To be hearing was to be the outsider. Hearing -- a forgotten feature now suspect. Hearing -- a reminder of difference.

Although only a minority of informants had a deaf grandparent, the legacy of multiple-generation deaf families extends beyond their immediate families. Becker (1980), Padden and Humphries (1988) and others have noted the cultural importance of these deaf-of-deaf. Although atypical in their family histories (less than 10% of deaf children are born to deaf parents), multiple-generation deaf people occupy a pivotal role in the Deaf community. Because schools for the deaf historically kept the language and customs of the Deaf shrouded in secrecy and shame, it was deaf-of-deaf children who provided a crucial link between their Deaf home environments and deaf children from hearing homes. Among their deaf school peers, they were the principal transmittors of Deaf culture. Meadow-Orlan (1987) and others have shown that deaf children of deaf parents outperform deaf children of hearing parents on all standards: intellectually, socially, and psychologically. As adults, these deaf-of-deaf frequently emerge as leaders and spokespersons within the Deaf community.

This legacy of strong Deaf culture and identity was often an advantage for their deaf parents, and informants from these multiple generation deaf families often developed a heightened sense of a deaf identity. Compared to informants with hearing grandparents, informants with deaf grandparents were much more likely to be fluent in sign language. Informants' immersion into the Deaf world was even more complete if they had deaf siblings -- a genetic feature more likely among multiple-generation deaf families. (See Chapter 5 for a discussion of deaf siblings.) Many of these informants served as the bridge between the deaf and hearing worlds not only for their deaf parents, but an entire clan of deaf relatives. George noted matter-of-factly:

> One day it was [interpreting for] Mom, the next day it was GrandDad. Or maybe my brother. Sometimes I felt like I was one big ear and mouth for the whole family!

Informants' exposure to deaf grandparents and other relatives gave a broader sense of deafness and Deaf culture, a perspective not confined to one's parents. Because deaf-of-deaf grandparents or parents were more likely to be core members of the Deaf community, informants' interaction with this community was even more routine. It is these informants who were the most likely to overtly identify and conceptualize their family experiences as "Deaf culture."

Just as this group of informants were more likely to perceive themselves as culturally Deaf, these men and women were also more likely to be estranged from a sense of themselves as hearing. Within these deaf-of-deaf families, the cultural normalcy of deafness often engulfed the occasional hearing relative. As Dan explained: "I was surrounded by deafness. It was all I knew." Although most informants reported being loved and accepted by their deaf grandparents, being hearing brought conflicts which had been kept outside of the family back within the walls of home. Mary Ann saw herself as a reminder to her deaf family of that "other" world:

> It's as if they forgot about hearing people. Forgot that you needed to hear to be quote "normal." And then I come along.

Informants' alignment among their relatives as hearing or deaf was difficult to avoid. Dan remembered a childhood in which his hearing grandparents favored him, but his deaf grandparents favored his deaf sister. Other informants completely identified with their deaf parents and grandparents, keeping their hearing identity separate from their family. Although most informants described being hearing and participating in the hearing world as experiences which were separate from and outside their deaf family, these perceptions were even more frequent among informants with extended family members who were deaf.

While deaf grandparents often accentuated informants' issues about being hearing in a deaf family, deaf grandparents' attitudes towards deafness or having a deaf child were not clear cut. Overall, informants with deaf grandparents described a less problematic and closer relationship between their grandparents and parents. Elaine explained: "My deaf grandparents knew about deafness, knew about communication issues, knew which schools to send their deaf child to." Yet, despite this shared experience of deafness, deaf grandparents were not immune to the broader hearing culture's views on deafness. Like hearing grandparents, a few deaf grandparents grieved that they did not have the perfect child: a hearing child. Deaf grandparents offered no uniform answers or responses to dealing with a deaf child. Often, cultural biases about signing and speaking, about deafness and hearing persisted:

> You'd think they [deaf grandparents] wouldn't send him [deaf father] off to oral schools or try to force him to speak since they never learned how to do it either. But I guess they just bought the party line. You know, Speak first, sign later. If you don't learn how to speak, you'll never amount to anything. All that negative bullshit they had to live through themselves, but then they put it on their own kid as well. I don't get it.

Despite varying attempts by deaf grandparents to mirror the hearing world, most of these informants credited their deaf grandparents with normalizing deafness for their parents. Unlike informants with hearing grandparents, these informants were rarely confronted with their family's blatant biases. Kevin's description of his hearing grandmother would have been untenable in a deaf-of-deaf family:

> Sometimes I would hear my [hearing] grandmother telling people that her daughter was <u>not</u> deaf. Something like, "You know, she's just a little hard-of-hearing." My mother is deaf! [signs: 'Deaf, closed.' 'Hears nothing!'] I even remember my grandmother saying things to my mother while her back was turned. But when my grandmother really wanted to talk to my mother, she would come to me and ask me to interpret.

Even if the deaf parent had hearing parents, informants reported that a parent's deaf sibling often reduced their parent's sense of alienation and isolation within their hearing family. Yet, neither deaf grandparents nor deaf relatives could guarantee an idyllic family life. Although Regina came from a large extended deaf family, she pointed out that conflicts within the family still existed:

> God, you know, there were years that my grandparents didn't speak to my parents. And every now and then, my aunt and my mother get into these huge fights. Just because they're all deaf, doesn't mean they get along. They're just like anybody else. They just don't have that extra thing to deal with.

It is this very sense of routine family interactions -- including disagreements -- which these informants often felt most secure. The conflicts within their family narratives were not between the deaf and the hearing, but between Aunt Mary and Dad, or between Grandma and Uncle Bill. Informants with hearing grandparents were often uncertain how to determine what effect better communication would have had within their families.

Among informants with deaf grandparents and relatives, it was often hearing, not deafness, which was the stranger. Many issues concerning informants with deaf grandparents and relatives are not restricted to this chapter. These informants' feelings and stories are threaded throughout the dissertation -- along with informants with hearing grandparents. However, among those from extended deaf families, there is an increased intensity -- a more confident sense of cultural Deafness and a greater uncertainty about being hearing. It is as if these deaf-of-deaf relatives provide a more distilled version of what it means to be deaf.

Through them, the richness and the biases of their culture became most apparent.

Family Gatherings

Whether informants' grandparents were deaf or hearing, one event described by many informants captures the essence of their divided households: family gatherings. Whether Christmas or Chanukah, birthday or anniversary, these occasions placed lifetimes of separation and misunderstanding literally within arm's reach: at the dining table. Two informants offered the following tableaus:

> [Russell:] The deaf relatives would sit in the living room, eating on tv trays. And the hearing relatives would be in the dining room. And every now and then someone from one room would get up and go into the other room and look around and nod and smile. Then they'd come back and sit down. Who knows what they were doing. Maybe they wanted to make sure everybody was still alive.
>
> [Liz:] One Thanksgiving my mother had this great idea, to have all the deaf and hearing relatives sit alternating, you know, one deaf, one hearing, one deaf, one hearing. Like that. They all got along just fine. The deaf people [signs 'signs', 'talks' 'across the table'] and the hearing people [pantomimes mouth movements] with the hearing people.

Although a few deaf and hearing relatives were able to communicate, in most cases it was no more than the "nod and smile" described above.

During these family gatherings, many informants were the principal bridge between these two worlds. Informants remembered intense conflicts of loyalty and of identity. For some, these situations provoked exasperation and anger when deaf parents were slighted by hearing relatives. At other times, it was an opportunity to experiment with being hearing:

> I remember one time stuffing my face and trying to talk to everybody. I wanted to see what it was like. I always had to be so careful when I was talking with my Mom or Dad. You know, "I can't read your lips because your mouth is full."

Informants often felt caught between facilitating the family's communication yet compromising their own experiences.

> People wanted to sing Christmas carols, and I didn't want to sign them. I wanted to just sing along with them. But then the Deaf would have said [signs 'What say?' 'What say?'] I tried doing it both [signing and singing] but it got too complicated, so after a while I just signed them.

Family gatherings heightened strained interactions: deaf relatives who were careful not to sign too much because it left the hearing relatives out; hearing people who either stopped talking or began talking inordinately loud because they worried about the deaf people. Bob described his dilemma: "I would try to sit back and just ignore everything. But it was so uncomfortable it was suffocating." Jean summarized her feelings with a wry smile: "Holidays from Hell!"

Family gatherings continued to be of concern to informants through adulthood. The chasm between hearing and deaf relatives had often become a routine and permanent feature of the family landscape. And, informants continued to feel torn in their affiliation and in their sense of obligation to bridge these two worlds. Gary described the efforts he and his fiance made to make sure that neither his deaf parents nor her hearing parents would feel left out at their wedding rehearsal dinner. An interpreter was hired. The hearing parents were given a crash course in sign language. The deaf parents were supplied with paper and pens. Yet, in the end, Gary found himself on familiar ground:

> My parents kept circling back to me. Like a magnet. They didn't want the [hired] interpreter. They wanted me. I guess I can understand it. This was family business. Not stuff you wanted to share with an outsider. But, there I was, right back in the middle of things.

Several informants resolved the problem by keeping the two worlds separate. During holidays, Art arranged two gatherings: one for his deaf family and friends; one for his hearing friends. Other informants like Maureen drew the line:

> Oh, I don't do it any more. I talk with the hearing people, I sign with the deaf people. And if anybody asks me to interpret, I tell them, "Hey, that's my job. I'm off work today! You go figure out how to talk with each other."

In addition to depicting the fissure between deaf and hearing relatives, these family gatherings illustrate two important issues of affiliation and identity which will be discussed in later chapters. First, most informants found it impossible to be both deaf and hearing at the same time. This is most evident in their family's communication difficulties. Although popularized as a solution, "Total Communication"[8]

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[8] See the Glossary for a more complete description of 'Total Communication.'

(signing and talking at the same time) was generally rejected by informants as an artifice which sacrificed the fluency and integrity of both languages. Secondly, within settings which accentuate the division of these two worlds, the one role which offered refuge from the "suffocating" discomfort was that of interpreter. It was a role which potentially robbed informants of a sense of themselves while reiterating their chimerical identity -- as neither deaf nor hearing, as both deaf and hearing.

Chapter 3 Summary

The narratives of informants with hearing and those with deaf grandparents emphasize different themes. The family histories of those with hearing grandparents convey the separation and the lack of communication between hearing grandparent and deaf parent. Sometimes a hearing grandparent and deaf parent were able to cross the gulf between them; often they were not. These informants stepped into a unique position within their family, bridging these separated family members, viewing their family history through dual perspectives. Informants with deaf grandparents learned the cultural normalcy of deafness. These deaf-of-deaf provided a family legacy not inhibited by internal stigma or communication barriers. Yet, this "different center" often intensified informants' sense of difference and isolation -- either within their deaf family or later as adults in a hearing world. Finally, in family gatherings which combined hearing and deaf family members and friends, informants' position between the deaf and hearing worlds was most succinctly epitomized.

SECTION II: FAMILY ALBUMS

CHAPTER 4: The Alternate Family: The Deaf School and Deaf Family Friends

Introduction to Chapter 4

During the year my fieldwork took me throughout the United States, I took advantage of the hospitality of informants as well as the wide network of my parents' friends. One time I stayed a few days with Hazel, an old family friend I have known since childhood. One evening after dinner, Hazel led me to a framed picture in her hallway. It was a drawing of her school, long since destroyed by fire. This residential school for the deaf had been an imposing multi-storied building with two towers. She pointed to the main entrance where her parents had brought her as a young girl. Hazel explained that the left tower was the girls' dormitories, the right was for the boys. She smiled as she remembered her adolescent years, looking across to the other tower and flirting with the boys. The rest of the evening Hazel told me of her many years at the school through stories of discovery, adventure and camaraderie.

For many informants, schools for the deaf were as much a part of their heritage as specific family members. Even though the "School"[1] may have wrenched a deaf parent from his

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[1] Among the Deaf, there are two common signs used for these residential schools: 'school,' and 'institute.' 'Institute' does not have the pejorative connotation that it does in English, but rather indicates that it was a residential school.

or her childhood home, it remained a significant and cherished homestead for many deaf adults. Within these schools, deaf peers transformed experiences of alienation and isolation into one of community and culture. These schools not only dominated much of their parents' childhood, they continued to be an important social arena for many deaf families including their hearing children. Life-long school friendships often formed the basis of a highly interactive social network. Deaf clubs, microcosms of the Deaf world, provided on-going activities within a uniquely Deaf environment. This chapter examines how their parents' peer-based environment -- the deaf school, deaf family friends, and the Deaf club -- became part of informants' own family histories.

The Deaf School

The overwhelming majority of informants' parents attended a residential school for the deaf.[2] (See Table K, Appendix A.) Frequently supplanting absent or diminished family interaction, schools for the deaf became the significant environments of socialization and cultural transmission --

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[2] This contrasts with current trends in deaf education. "Approximately one-third of school-age deaf children attend private or public residential schools...The rest live at home and attend day programs in schools for the deaf or special day classes...or are mainstreamed into regular school programs." 'Deafness: A fact sheet from Gallaudet College and the National Association of the Deaf.' Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University, 1991.

concerning deafness as well as family life.[3] In their pioneering cross-cultural study of childhood socialization, Whiting and Whiting (1975) concluded that it was the setting in which a child was raised (such as the arrangement of space, who was included and with what frequency, how much the child participated in the activities around him or her) rather than specific methods of child-training which had the greatest socializing influence on the child. Although many informants were respectful of the strong attachment and loyalty their parents had towards their schools, informants also questioned how their parents' separation from their families and these institutional environments affected their family history. What part of informants' own family heritages have been indelibly altered by these transplanted homesteads?

Residential schools modeled a family life considerably different from a deaf child's family of origin, convoluting the widely-held observation that boarding schools routinely divorce minority children from their native language and culture (See Grosjean 1982, p. 209 ff). For deaf children, these schools were where they found their native language and culture. Residential schools favored a communal rather than individually-oriented nuclear family environment, parallelling other child-rearing collectives such as those set up within kibbutzim. For many deaf children, these schools were their

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[3] Padden and Humphries (1988) observe: "In the informal dormitory environment children learn not only sign language but the content of the culture" (p. 6).

total life -- daytime and evening, weekday and weekend.[4] Regimentation was often the norm. Informants described idiosyncratic, occasionally humorous parental behaviors which originated within these early school years:

> My Mom's thing is she hates overhead lights. Her whole life in the dorms there were glaring overhead lights. Whenever we go someplace with overhead lights, she looks at me and I know exactly what she's thinking. Turn them off!

Regimens of school life often became part of the informant's upbringing as well:

> Well, when you get raised in an institution, you don't get to choose what you eat. You just eat everything on the plate. That's it. No arguments. That's how my parents were raised, and that's they raised me.

Although informants shared many anecdotal stories of school life which their parents had passed on to them, informants also discussed more serious consequences of residential life -- both for their parents and for themselves. Catherine explained:

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[4] Most deaf parents had some contact with their families as children: a few went home weekly, many only occasionally throughout the year. Many informants reported that their parent(s) preferred to stay at school rather than going home to face minimal interaction and frequent isolation within their hearing families.

> My mother went away to a residential school when she was four and I think that affected her. Well, I know it did...I remember she never gave me any guidelines, I just had to make my choices. But when I made choices, they were wrong. "You're naughty." "That's not nice." "Be polite." "Be a good girl." Give me some guidelines! But I'd get no direction. When I got married, my mother-in-law would give me advice all the time. Probably too much. Like telling me not to get pregnant because it might be born deaf. But my mother never gave me any advice. Ever. My parents were there for me when I needed them, but I always felt I raised myself.

Catherine touches upon a central concern among informants with regard to residential schools: a limited worldview. Although many favored residential schools as the best available option, informants also criticized many of these schools for limiting a deaf child's access to a variety of information and experiences. Ted complained that school personnel were often no better than most hearing parents at being able to communicate with a deaf child:

> Everything boiled down to rules. You did this, or you didn't do that. We all get that, I guess, but at least we get other information. But how on earth were these deaf kids ever supposed to question rules? Most of the teachers and principals couldn't carry on a conversation with a deaf kid to save their life. All these kids knew was if they didn't do something, they would get punished.

While several informants agreed with Ted's assessment of educators' communication skills, others focused on how these schools unavoidably separated the deaf child from the outside world. The residential school's physical isolation was seen as accentuating the communicative isolation of deafness. Howard shifted from discussing the effect residential school had on his parents to how it had affected him:

> Deaf people always seem like they're a generation behind in social awareness. Our parents, because they were institutionalized, didn't make the proper transitions between childhood and adulthood. I guess we did. Or, maybe we missed them as well.

A number of informants like Howard attributed social and informational delays among their deaf parents to their life in the residential schools. Several informants felt their parents learned through their hearing children as Howard later explained:

> Sometimes I watched other people just to learn how you were supposed to do it. Like, sometimes I just didn't know. Then sometimes I just fumbled my way. You know, now when I look back, I realize I was bringing in a lot of information to Mom and Dad. It was like I had to pave the way for them.

An article written by Linda Konner (1987), the hearing daughter of deaf parents, captures this sense of information ambassador by its title: 'I Was My Parents' Radio.'

By their very nature, residential schools created a paradoxical environment: a normalizing experience with others of a similar condition; an emphasis on being different from others. Economic, social and geographic differences often receded in this communal environment. Two informants offered complementary evidence of how their family histories had been altered:

> [Fred:] You know I always sensed this hostility between my Mom and her hearing sister. I found out that my aunt had a lot of resentment like when my Mom went away to school during the Depression. Any money that the family had went to get her uniforms. And she had nice clothes and three meals a day. That was my aunt's perception. And she resented that because she got shit. She was stuck at home with a crazy grandmother and two brothers. My aunt had to quit school so she could help work. And here my mother is off getting a good education.

> [Harriet:] God, I remember when I first met my Dad's brother. Talk about money! He's this upper class, big business, the whole nine yards. I suppose it's not that surprising -- my grandparents were wealthy. But, my Dad was never really a part of it. Not really. I mean, they left him money, but it was different. He never grew up in that environment. It's like the money dropped in out of the blue. He might as well have won the lottery.

Family routines, ethnic traditions, hometown communities, poverty or wealth -- all were diminished, in many cases lost.

A few informants like Alice described the synergistic effects of residential schools and non-communicative families:

> You know, Barbara [another informant] and I were talking about how our parents don't react, or don't seem to show a lot of feeling when we have a lot of pain. And then she started crying and said that it's just like common sense. They should nurture us. They should just do that. But they come from a residential school. They didn't have much to do with their families. What role models did they have for nurturing? And I think we were raised the same way. We feel the loss but it's also understandable. We never got it because they never got it.

Although not all informants agreed with Alice's concern about being nurtured, many informants did attribute various deficiencies in their upbringing to a combination of their parents' families of origin and their parents' school environment. This was true whether or not the parent attended a residential school. Informants whose parents attended regular public schools or commuted daily to special schools were just as critical about these school environments. Although their deaf parents lived at home as children, these informants frequently viewed this arrangement as forfeiting a shared peer culture and access to other deaf adults. Living in a hearing home was little guarantee of improved social interaction or information.

> My Dad never went to a residential school. Some people might think he was lucky, but living at home was no great shakes. He mostly just stayed in his room...It took him a long time to become comfortable with being deaf, with being with other deaf people.

In addition to creating a regimented environment, schools also promoted an unalterable differential: those who were in power, those who determined the deaf's fate were inevitably hearing. Until recently, many schools for the deaf throughout the United States would not allow deaf teachers in the classroom or restricted them to certain subjects or older students.

Despite their criticisms of residential schools, most informants generally endorsed them. In many cases, this support developed from what many saw as a lack of better options. Diane put herself in the situation:

> God! I keep thinking what would I do if I had a deaf child. This is awful. I keep thinking is what I want to do is live near a residential school, have them go to residential school during the day -- if they're really bright and residential school doesn't challenge them, mainstream half day and residential school the other half the day. And I'll be obviously [laughs] in my car driving back and forth making sure all their social needs are met, all their educational needs are met.

Others were dubious that most home environments would ever meet the deaf child's needs. Robert warned:

> Sure, you can keep saying that parents should learn to communicate with their deaf child. Oh, it sounds great! Terrific! But in the end, they never do. They didn't do it back then, and they're still not doing it now. And all those years are wasted. It's better to at least give the kid a chance.

Many informants like Diane and Robert acknowledged the one strength that these residential schools offered their parents: not being alone -- either as children or as adults. Despite variation in deaf children's geographic home territories, isolation from the deaf world and persistent opposition to Deaf language and identity from the hearing world, deaf children who attended various residential schools emerged with a remarkably unifying language and culture. It was the residential schools' opportunity for cultural participation which overrode its other failings. And, a generation later, being exposed to the Deaf community and culture is what many informants agreed was one of the most significant benefits of having deaf parents.

Deaf Friends

This section moves beyond the historical framework of parents' schools to their network of friends -- many of whom dated back to these early school years. Within many informants' childhood homes, their parents' deaf friends were more like extended family members, in some sense substituting for the infrequent and often problematic relationships with hearing relatives.

> My parents imbued us -- my brother and I -- with the beauty of their friendships. They loved their schoolmates, their friends. They were so valuable and so loved that I grew to love them too. Their friends are all gone now, but that was a long lifetime of friendships. But it was never ever at the expense of our family. We were all loved, equally.

Deaf friends' routine presence within the family provided hearing children with an increased immersion into the Deaf community and culture, establishing an important dimension to the experience of deafness: peer-based relationships united by shared communication and an interactive community.

Very few informants remembered their parents having hearing friends. Several informants mentioned an occasional hearing neighbor or co-worker, but these relationships were usually circumstantial and not characteristically intimate. Gerald described one of his father's hearing acquaintances:

> This one guy John would always try to talk with my father [here he used exaggerated mouth and lip movements]. But, you know how it goes, he [father] would just nod and pretend to understand it all. He didn't understand half of what John was talking about.

For Gerald, the lack of communication between his father and this hearing man constituted a major obstacle to friendship. Indeed, most informants reported their parents' friendships were exclusively among other deaf people. As informants described their parents' deaf friends, two communication issues stood out -- one by its absence, and one by its repeated presence. In contrast to the persistent communication difficulties which characterized interactions with most hearing family members and acquaintances, informants almost never mentioned communication problems when talking about their parents' deaf friends. Instead, informants typically described their parents' friends by various memorable incidents, their sense of humor, their eccentricity, their long history with the family. Paradoxically, communication was a major focus of activity among their parents and their deaf friends. Jeanette explained:

> It didn't matter whose house they were at, or whether they got together morning, noon or night. They got together and they all sat around and they talked. And they talked and talked.

The chance for more fluid and interactive communication among deaf friends sharply contrasted with its absence in most other social situations.

Although sometimes disparaged as "gossip", talking with other deaf people is a critical source of information for most deaf people -- about each other and about the world at large. Until the more recent development of adaptive telephone equipment such as the TTY, deaf people were limited to face-to-face communication. Access to most forms of information was often haphazard.[5] In spite of substantially increased media options for the Deaf, face-to-face communication remains the preferred form of interaction and information for many

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[5] Lipreading is often inaccurate; it is estimated that the best lipreader can understand only one-third of spoken speech without other contextual clues. Although there are a number of English-literate deaf people, English reading skills among many deaf adults averages between 4th and 6th grade levels. This discrepancy limits access to printed information as well as closed-captioned television programs.

deaf people. The importance of talking with other deaf people places considerable value on frequent social interaction as Sally's description illustrates:

> Sometimes we'd come home and they'd [deaf friends] be waiting on the porch. Sometimes they'd be sitting outside in their car. They'd wait all day. They'd just wait until we got home. They couldn't wait to tell us some news.

The irony of friendships which valued face-to-face communication is that a number of informants were unable to talk with their parents' friends. With the exception of those informants who signed, whatever idiosyncratic combination of speech or home-made pantomimes was used between hearing child and deaf parent rarely carried over to deaf family friends. Although Judith's parents and many of their friends were oral, she found communicating with them difficult:

> Basically I couldn't communicate with these people. Most of my parents' friends could speak, but that was not their comfortable element of communication. They preferred a combination or just sign.

One time while still heavily medicated after surgery, Judith's mother imagined this scene from her hospital bed:

> She kept telling me that her friends were there. All her friends were there. And they wanted to talk to me but I wouldn't talk to them. "Why wouldn't I talk to them?" she kept asking. "You always embarrassed me, you always do this to me, you always make me feel this way." And I just sat down and I cried and I cried and I cried. I realized what she was saying was, "We didn't teach you sign language but we want you to talk to our friends." When I was a kid around these deaf friends, I didn't understand a thing they were saying. Well, they didn't understand what I was saying either. I would have talked to them, but I couldn't. It was kind of a double-bind.

Although many informants felt comfortable around their parents' friends and frequently identified them as kin, the interaction between hearing children and deaf family friends was often constrained by how well they could communicate with each other.

In contrast to informants like Judith, a few informants who could communicate with family friends encountered a different problem: family friends who depended on the informant to be their interpreter. Thelma's fluency in sign contrasted with other hearing children of deaf parents in her local Deaf community. Her role as "community interpreter" was an important part of Thelma's childhood memories and intimately connected with her assessment of having deaf parents. Her mother's friends exacerbated Thelma's sense of being overburdened as a child:

> I hated it when her friends came over -- who had children, children my age, older or younger -- and wanted me to be their interpreter for them to go to the bank, take care of their business. My mother would [signs 'you interpret (for) them]. I was the community interpreter. I was put in situations I didn't know I could say no to. I was very bitter, I was a very bitter child growing up, having deaf parents.

Childhood and adult implications of disparate language skills among informants is explored in Chapter 5, which examines linguistic asymmetry in its most intimate setting: among siblings.

Another characteristic illustrated by family friends concerns the tendency to interact as a group -- whether sitting around talking, playing cards, or going to the Deaf club. An emphasis on the group rather than the individual introduces another key feature of the Deaf experience: loyalty to Deaf friends and the Deaf community. Whether their parents were core members or on the periphery, the Deaf community was the critical reference group for most deaf parents. Historical traditions of communal life in the schools complemented external and internal social pressures to belong to a Deaf group. In comparing Deaf and Hearing cultures, the differing emphases on group solidarity versus individual autonomy is a value second only to their contrasting views on communication.

Among informants, the tension between belonging to a group and striking out on one's own was keenly felt both among deaf parents as well as their hearing children. Those few informants whose parents did not live near other Deaf people or were not active in their local Deaf community often described their parents as "isolated," "lonely," "missing out." In contrast, among informants and their parents who grew up within an active and visible Deaf community, feelings of alienation and difference were far more likely to be minimized. The communication and support that deaf friends and the larger Deaf community provided deaf parents was seen as an enriching experience by most informants. For a number of men and women, their parents' dedication to either family or friends outweighed the other. Several informants were critical of how their family life lost out to their parents' friends. Julian assessed his childhood experiences

> My trust was broken because my parents said we'd go do this, but then they would decide they wanted to do something else with their deaf friends instead. So, they went out with them. Their deaf friends were more important than the family...I had to fight my alternate family. My parents best friends were always their number one priority.

Although she was similarly critical of her parents' friendships, Wanda suggested an alternative explanation:

> My parents always used to stress the importance of family. Always think of your family first. Yet, they did more for their friends than they did for their own family. I always hated that. But, maybe it's like teenage culture, that your friends are more important than family.

An imbalance between family and friendships and family could also favor the family. A few informants felt their parents sacrificed their deaf life for their hearing children. Brian explained

> I see it now more clearly. They gave up a lot of being with their friends to be with us. To give time for me and my sister. It must have been hard for them, to go to all those hearing things at school and all that. I mean there weren't any interpreters back then. They just went to show that they supported us, that they loved us...but they gave up an awful lot.

The presence of deaf friends and their degree of involvement with the family enhances the degree of hearing childrens' contact with other deaf people. This network of family friendships also represents a much larger commitment to the values of the Deaf rather than the Hearing world: one which emphasizes frequent communal interaction rather than isolated autonomy. As informants entered their adolescent and young adult years, their development toward self-sufficiency also moved them toward the values and ideals of the dominant hearing culture. This trajectory not only raised the issue of abandoning deaf parents, it also conflicted with a fundamental pattern of social obligation and interaction within the Deaf community. The question of informants' identity not only fell along the axis of whether one was deaf or hearing but, even more importantly, encompassed which behaviors and values one espoused and embraced.

The Deaf Club

The Deaf club embodies key features of Deaf culture: an arena of frequent interaction among those with a shared identity. (See the Glossary for a short description of a Deaf club.) Individual Deaf clubs demonstrate less homogenous aspects of the Deaf community: many clubs are often segregated according to age, class, race or method of communication. Some focus on a particular sport, religion or school attended. (See Padden and Humphries 1988, p. 73 ff. for a brief discussion of historical trends of Deaf clubs.) Yet, the boundaries of each Deaf club are rarely rigid. Many Deaf social events draw from all of these smaller-based clubs in spite of their conflicting affiliations. Although there are subgroups within the Deaf community, an underlying sense of shared identity and common destiny cuts across these differences. And, the various social and political activities are united by the cornerstone of this culture: the interest in and the opportunity to communicate.

Accompanying their parents to the Deaf club was a routine part of many informants' childhood. Particularly as young children, almost half of all informants went to a Deaf club as often as once a week. Hearing children's interaction at the Deaf club was sometimes limited by their communication skills, sometimes by their age. When asked what they did at the Deaf club, informants remembered both participating in club-wide activities (such as listening to deaf storytellers or watching captioned movies) as well as pursuing separate activities by themselves or with other hearing children of deaf parents. Jack fondly remembered playing with other hearing children at the Deaf club:

> God! I can just picture all of us kids running around all the time screaming our heads off! Sometimes we had to be careful depending on who was there. [Here Jack described a few deaf people who had some hearing.] Sometimes one of them would hear us and yell at us to be quiet. But mostly, nobody cared. We just had a great time!

Deaf clubs were organized by and attended by deaf people. Hearing children of deaf parents were the one regular exception to this exclusive Deaf environment. Viewed as an extension of the network of deaf friends, the Deaf club echoes many similar themes previously discussed: a normalizing and supportive environment; communication as a central activity; and a commitment to the group. A few informants were critical of the amount of time parents spent at the Deaf club. Yet, considering the dominant presence of deaf people and the lack of sign language skills among many informants, it is remarkable how positively the Deaf club was remembered among most informants. Although several informants regretted their level of participation due to their language skills, no informant described feeling like they did not belong because they were hearing. While a few men and women saw themselves as peripheral members of the Deaf club, they still felt included as part of the larger group.

One of the more common terms used by informants to describe the Deaf club was 'safe': "I felt safe there"; "You got this feeling of being safe." For many informants and their parents, venturing outside their homes meant chancing stigma and miscommunication. The Deaf club provided a safe and normalizing environment outside the home for deaf parents as well as their hearing children. Because interacting with the Hearing world was generally unnecessary within the Deaf club, many informants' routine responsibilities such as interpreting or telephoning for their parents could be temporarily abandoned. Goffman (1955; 1963) spoke of the risk of losing one's individuality in exchange for the support of the group. Yet, paradoxically, within a community of shared identity, individual differences can emerge -- identities which are not restricted to a single all-encompassing feature.

Within an environment like the Deaf club in which deafness was the norm, informants could be less focused on deafness or themselves as hearing children of deaf parents.[6] This minimized feelings of difference as well as the need to filter information or comments. This was most evident when informants shared stories about various eccentric people at the Deaf club or remembered with humor the sound of certain deaf people's voices. Art described one such woman:

> She had one of those voices, you know, that just pierces. God, I felt sorry for her daughter. Every time she'd call her [daughter] she'd go [Here Art imitated a high-pitched "Lu-lu-lu-lu"] And her [daughter's] name was something like Becky! Of course, my old man, his voice was something else too. When he called me, boy, did I come running!

When I asked Art if he had ever shared these observations with anyone else, he shook his head:

> Well, all us kids did crazy silly things, you know, at the Deaf club. Nobody thought about it. But, we never did it 'round hearing people. And, the deaf people didn't know. I mean, people'd think we're making fun of them. But, it's not that, it's just like, well, they made funny noises and it was okay.

Art's reference to "us kids" raises the question of children at the Deaf club: deaf children, and other hearing children of deaf parents. A few informants remembered playing with deaf children; most did not.[7] Even among informants with a high degree of contact with the Deaf community, their

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[6] Ablon (1984) describes a similar dynamic among dwarfs attending Little People of America conferences.

[7] Out of 142 informants who had no deaf siblings, only 14 described any regular or significant contact with deaf children while they were growing up.

interaction was almost exclusively with deaf adults. Where were all the deaf children? Their absence was explained by a number of factors. Many deaf children attended a residential school away from their home community. Even when it was possible to go to the Deaf club or other Deaf events, a number of deaf children were discouraged from going by their parents. Mostly hearing parents (and a few deaf parents as well) were ambivalent about these Deaf activities -- either because they themselves were uncomfortable among deaf adults or because they perceived the Deaf club as encouraging the child to identify as deaf and not hearing. The lack of childhood deaf peers among informants contrasts with the prevailing peer-based relationships of their parents. For most informants, the primary reference group of deaf people was adults -- and, not just any adults, but their parents. Informants' hearing status created both functional as well as heirarchical differences between themselves and other members of the Deaf community. These features form the basis of an exploration of marginality which is discussed in Chapter 10.

Although most informants remember some childhood contact with other hearing children of deaf parents -- children of their parents' friends, or children at the Deaf club and other Deaf events -- many commented on how they failed to form independent friendships outside Deaf events or maintain friendships as adults. Several informants found themselves wondering what happened to other hearing children of deaf parents. When I first met Alex, he greeted me with,

> I always knew there were others out there like me, but I never knew what happened to them. You're the first one I've met in 15 years.

If deaf people banded together because of shared history, culture and identity, why didn't their hearing children? What explains this lack of coalescing among a group which otherwise shared similar life experiences and perspectives?

Within the normative environment of home or Deaf club, deafness was often removed from focus. Selma explained:

> We didn't need to talk about having deaf parents. [Laughs.] We could do other things...like just be kids.

In contrast, informants' most intense memories of being a hearing child of deaf parents generally emerge from the dichotomization between being deaf and being hearing. The Deaf social events which brought hearing children of deaf parents together rarely provided this contrast. In those situations, hearing children could be hearing ("screaming our heads off") at the same time their deaf parents could be deaf (talking through signing or lipreading). Although parallel, informants' experiences with public stigma or family responsibilities usually remained highly encapsulated within their individual families. Ironically, the need to seek out or belong to a supportive group came at times when they were most separated. Also, informants' spirit of protectiveness was a powerful force which frequently disparaged acknowledging differences. Walter explained his paradoxical stance:

> I didn't hang around with Bill [another hearing child of deaf parents] even though we were in the same class. It was like, well, we each need to make it and show them. ["Show them what?"] Show them that we're just like anybody else. Just because our parents are deaf, doesn't mean anything...["So, did it mean anything?"] Sure, but I wasn't gonna let anybody know that.

For most informants, adolescence and adulthood heralded a shift towards the hearing world. Attending Deaf functions and socializing with their parents' friends decreased for most informants as Debora described:

> When I was 13 or 14, I got to that age. I didn't want to go to the Deaf club. I didn't want to go to the Deaf social gatherings any longer. I wanted to go out with my friends and do my thing. And my Dad would say, [signs and voices: "You think deaf nothing! Hearing better than me?"] No! but I never could explain that and I'd get real angry and we'd have these fights. I felt guilty because I'm trying to leave this deaf world and go off and do my own thing. It was just like, I can't win for losing!

As informants took their place in the hearing world, the paradoxical turmoil of their split identity often subsided in favor of the hearing world. Although several informants continued attending Deaf clubs and events, most informants' contact with the Deaf world became increasingly restricted to the circle of their immediate family. When I asked Selma how going to the Deaf club differed as an adult, she explained:

> When I was little, I was with Mom and Dad. I mean, What were they gonna do with an eight year old? It was okay. But now, well, I'm an adult. I'm hearing. Don't get me wrong. I feel like I belong alright, but only for a while. Like I'm a visitor or something...

Although many informants similarly described being welcome within Deaf clubs and the Deaf community as adults, they were also more aware of their paradoxical identity. Selma continued her thoughts about being a "visitor" in the Deaf world:

> It's like, you have to come to terms with the fact that you're really a hearing person. You can't be deaf any more.

For some informants, the resolution in favor of a "hearing" identity precluded interest in participating in Deaf activities or contacting other hearing children of deaf parents. Steve shared the sentiments of a few other informants:

> I know. I feel some connection to them. But, my life growing up with deaf parents I did by myself. There wasn't anybody else around. I had to deal with it alone. I mean, I wouldn't be talking to you if I didn't feel like we have something in common. But, that was all in the past. You know, like getting together with your old high school buddies. I have my own life now.

For most informants, however, their paradoxical identity lingered and swerved between these two worlds. And, despite their apparent assimilation into the Hearing world, many informants confessed that it was within the world of the deaf that they were most at home.

CODA (Children of Deaf Adults) has developed largely around an exploration of shared history and identity among hearing children of deaf parents. Participation or non-participation in the organization among informants often reflected the tension between individual and group orientation. Because of the diversity of individual member's family backgrounds (including differing communication methods, family members' personalities, and overall family histories), informants who had attended at least one CODA meeting or conference reported varying degrees of 'fit' with other participants. Most informants who participated responded the way Agnes did:

> The first minute I got there [CODA conference], I felt like, I'm home. These people are like me. They understand me. I'm one of them.

Many of these informants felt that even if their precise family experiences differed, they nevertheless shared a history of Deaf culture -- including the frequent oppression and stigmatization by hearing people, as well as the sense of not quite fitting into the Deaf world. Several other informants who chose not to continue involvement with CODA felt that the organization was primarily interested in resolving psychodynamic issues. Jonathan explained:

> Oh, you know, it's just another one of those finding-yourself-groups. I don't need to find myself. I know who I am.

A few informants felt their family experience were highly personal and not to be shared outside their own family. These issues will be explored further in Chapter 10.

Chapter Summary

After our interview, Sam mailed me a few thoughts he had written. He began by telling me that our interview had sparked all sorts of forgotten memories and the most vivid of them all was his recollection of the Deaf club:

> All those bodies in motion, the sharp voices, the lively animation. Small groups of two, three or four. Each one different. One with everybody riveted to a storyteller. Another group with everybody all talking at the same time. Some who stood and glanced from one group to the other. Scattered couples, standing or sitting in folding chairs, nodding or talking. It was so vibrant. All us kids yelling and screaming about the monsters while racing up and down the stairs. I remember the windows there. They were these special windows, the kind of glass they use in bathrooms to blur the vision. When I pressed my eyes up to the glass, the red and yellow and green flashes of the stoplights outside became colored snowflakes. I remember sometimes we would take time out from our relentless screaming and running and game playing and look out the windows, especially when it was winter cold and too dark and bitter to go outside and play in the parking lot. I can hear the the voices of the deaf adults in the background. Strangely pitched and modulated. I remember how safe I felt. It was the safest place I can ever imagine.

The Deaf School, Deaf friends, and the Deaf club. Despite some feelings of rivalry for their parents' attention, these alternate families were remembered by many informants as more of a family than their own blood relatives. In this family, informants and their parents could be themselves. Here the mark and the significance of being deaf receded to reveal gossips and storytellers, pranksters and organizers. Schools for the deaf began a lifetime of shared community and refuge from social alienation -- while implicitly incorporating many of the broader cultural beliefs which set them apart. They represent a paradox of identity for deaf parents as well as their hearing children: to be separate from others because of your difference, and to seek out those who are similar so you can be yourself.

SECTION II: FAMILY ALBUMS

CHAPTER 5 IMPERFECT MIRRORS: BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Introduction to Chapter 5

Greta was one of five hearing children. Although all of them took turns interpreting phone calls or for occasional visitors, each child developed a particular area of interpreting responsibility within the family. One dealt with the car, another with household repairs, one with finances, another shopping, and one with doctors. When I asked Greta whether these various areas of expertise correlated with any adult careers, she laughed and shook her head.

> No, but at least we all pitched in together. My sisters and brothers and I are so close. Both as kids and even now. I talk to them all the time...And when we wanted to know something, when something wasn't right, we didn't go ask Mom and Dad. We sat down together and we talked about it. "Well, what makes that weird noise?" "Well, I don't know." We would talk about it. [Laughs.] We came up with some really strange ideas.

Roger was the younger of two hearing children. He had been explaining why he never learned sign language very well and how his relationship with his sister was strained at best:

> I feel like my sister always stood between my parents and me. It's like she tried to be my mother. She would always tell me what to do and how to do it. She did all the interpreting, all the calling, everything! And you know, I figured, well, if she wants to do it all, let her. I've got my own life!

Erica's sister was deaf. I asked her how having a deaf sibling differed from having deaf parents.

> Oh, in some ways, sure, I had to do some of the same things like interpret. But, my sister was like me. Like a mirror image of me, or me of her. It's like I was what she could have been if she had been hearing. And she was what I could have been if I was deaf.

Of the 150 informants, 123 had at least one other sibling. Informants' siblings were opportunities to share childhood experiences as well as adult reflections. The sign for either 'brother' or 'sister' is a compound sign: 'male' + 'same' or 'female' + 'same.' For myself, as researcher but also as an only child, siblings suggested a change in direction. This would be a chance not merely to consider how individual informants' interpreted their family experiences but a way of comparing interpretations: were siblings telling the same story?

The first section in this chapter deals with the frequent variation in communication skills among hearing siblings. The next section considers how sibling relationships were affected by these communication imbalances. A third section examines having a deaf sibling. Finally, in discussing how informants' views of their siblings reflect their own identity, the issue of interpretation itself is examined:

> I can't believe we all sat around the same table and now we can't even agree on anything: what we ate, what we said, what went on. Nothing!

An Elusive Link

Although all siblings in some families could communicate equally well with their parents, this was not typical. In

over half of the families with more than one child, one sibling became what a number of informants referred to as "the designated family interpreter." This child facilitated communication not only between parents and hearing outsiders but often between parents and other siblings. This feature occurred whether the parents' principal communication method was sign language or lipreading. Not unexpectedly, the role of family interpreter often fell to the eldest child. Of the 63 informants who described one sibling in their family as the principal interpreter, 37 identified this as the eldest sibling. Out of the remaining 26 families in which the principal family interpreter was not the eldest child, 17 identified the designated interpreter as the eldest daughter and 4 other identified another daughter (not the eldest). The discrepancies in communication skills among siblings raise several questions: Why were all children in the family not equally fluent? How did one particular child become designated, and why was it more often a girl than a boy? How did parents communicate with their other children before the "designated interpreter" came along? And, perhaps most significant of all, how did this communication imbalance affect relationships within the family?

Many informants were keenly aware of hearing children of deaf parents who lacked effective ways to talk with their parents -- whether in other families, among their own siblings or, in some cases, themselves. Adam spoke wrenchingly of lost opportunities:

> I mean, I had to go and take a [sign language] class when I was 24 years old. 24 years old! Just so I can finally start having a conversation with my parents. Damn it! All that time wasted! Why? Why?

Although Adam explained that as a child he could, in fact, communicate with his parents, like many other informants Adam felt this interaction was limited and often superficial.[1] Several informants who had opportunities to work with or observe other deaf parents and their hearing children noticed this recurrent pattern:

> I see this thing of the brokenness. It keeps going on and on. When I have to interpret for juvenile court, I see it all the time! And it's like, Well, what can we do with this kid? I mean, he's thirteen years old, he can't talk with his parents. He's angry, he hates his deaf parents. But nobody thinks, Maybe we should work on communication issues in the family. But, no, they decide, Let's put 'em in day care...Hell, why doesn't anybody ever stop to ask, why can't this kid communicate with his parents?

Most informants felt that lifetimes of negative social denigration toward sign language inevitably led to such family communication fissures. Deaf parents themselves often had no other communication options. Yet, like many other immigrant groups, many deaf parents encouraged their children to use the dominant language -- even at the expense of inter-family communication. Even among informants whose parents were described as primarily oral, most reported their parents preferred using some sign language between themselves or close

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[1] The most common means of communication between family members who did not use a version of American Sign Language or an oral English method was 'home signs' (see Glossary).

friends.

Not all deaf parents or their hearing children were equally affected by this linguistic hegemony. Nor did all children who were fluent in sign language become the family interpreter. As described in Chapters 2 and 3, individual family histories shaped parental attitudes toward deafness and toward using an identifiably different means of communication such as sign language. Informants' birth order, temperament and gender all parlayed into differential communication uses among siblings. Many first-born informants cited their hearing status as their parents' first real opportunity to interface with the hearing world. The role of interpreter or cultural link was most likely to fall to the first child. Many other informants who were not first-born agreed with this assessment. Some separated out their communication skills from actual interpreting responsibilities. Despite being fluent in sign language, Maureen rejected the responsibilities her older sister took on:

> There's a big difference in where you are in the family, too...My oldest sister, she was with my Mom and Dad at a time when they were real young and they didn't know how to deal with the world as well. I think a lot of people grow up with their kids. So, she was the one that helped Mom and Dad when they were growing up, so to speak. Financially, there's a lot less money when the first child is born than there is on the second or third. I mean, I was spoiled rotten. By the time it was my turn, I wouldn't take my turn. I said, Forget it! I'm not doing what you did. I was the one that rebelled...I learned a lot from my older sisters. In just general life stuff. They made mistakes that I learned from and I didn't have to make the same mistakes.

The personality, temperament and linguistic skills of a particular sibling sometimes overrode birth order. In describing his own signing ability as "fairly good," Norman explained why both his sister and brother were better at it:

> My sister [the oldest] was good [at signing], but she had a better rapport with our parents. So you might say rapport had a lot to do with it...My brother was more fluent. He was the most talented you might say with the sign language. He went into interpreting for the deaf, he was a teacher for the deaf, he went into more areas for the deaf. He was more fluent. I have to admit, he was pretty good.

The availability of other siblings also affected how much any one sibling had to take on interpreting responsibilities. In several families, the role of primary interpreter shifted to another sibling as one child grew older or left home. Other informants reported that even after the primary interpreter (themself or another sibling) left home, that person continued to act as their parents' main interpreter -- even though other siblings were still living at home.

Although the eldest child was most likely to be the primary family interpreter, this was less true if the eldest child was male. Thelma explained:

> I'm the middle child. But I'm the only one who does the interpreting. [How did that happen?] Great question! [Laughs.] I really don't know how that happened. I guess because I was the one who was more fascinated with the sign language. My mother's sister, one of her baby sisters, stayed with us. My mother taught her and she in turn taught us. Not actually taught, because my mother taught us as well. To make structured sentences and adding on vocabulary and all that. How I got picked to be the interpreter, I don't know, but I regretted it. I regretted it like hell simply because, whenever I was called to do the interpreting, I always wanted my brother and sister to do it, and they were <u>asked</u> if they wanted to do it, and all they have to say was "no". And then, it was for me to do it. Well, I'm the oldest daughter, so maybe that's why.

Informants themselves offered two main explanations for this pattern. A number of informants felt that expressive facial, hand and body movements were more likely to be socially identified as feminine and this favored girls being the interpreters. As additional corroboration, several pointed out that professional interpreters (whether children of deaf parents or not) were more likely to be women or gay men. Other informants felt that the role of interpreting itself was more generally a subordinate helping role and therefore more likely to be given to or assumed by women. Indeed, researchers have noted the general predisposition towards having girls be family caretakers (Lewis and Meredith 1988).

Although either of these explanations are plausible, there were a few families in which this pattern did not hold. Matthew's situation points to the need for a more encompassing perspective. Matthew was a middle child. His older sister was two years older than he was. Yet, he -- not his older sister -- was the main family interpreter. I asked him how

this happened.

> Oh, that's easy. My father decided that the men should do the work, not the women. In our family, interpreting was a job.

Matthew's explanation underscores a significant issue: the function, value and meaning of sign language and interpreting: within a given family. The use of sign language could be stigmatizing or distinguishing. Interpreting could be gender-identified or not. Gwen described how signing and interpreting became an expression of sibling rivalry in her family:

> My sister and I would fight over who would get to go and interpret. It's like it was a chance to do something different, to be somewhere else. And so we'd both say, Oh, I'm better than you are. People understand me better. My fingerspelling is better than yours.

The importance of considering each family's meaning system also explains apparently contraditory examples of parental favoritism. Some informants felt their parents favored the more fluent signing sibling(s) or those who were the main interpreter(s). Others felt that their parents favored siblings who did not sign or interpret:

> My brother got away with murder. He never had to do anything...But, whenever they wanted anything, I was the one they called, I was the one that got dumped on.

If the oldest child was not the main interpreter, was there no communication between that child and his or her parents until the interpreter sibling came along? Although it is possible that some children were severely deprived of

language exchange with their parents, it is also possible that initial communication existed. A variety of individual and family variables could have shifted the communication spotlight from one sibling to another. An older sibling's initial sign language usage and skills may have decreased in favor of a later sibling. Grosjean (1982) notes that language maintenance is dependent on need:

> Children will become bilingual when psychosocial factors create a need for communication in two languages, and...they will revert back to monolingualism just as quickly when such factors disappear or are no longer considered important (p. 179).

The actual extent of language use or deprivation in early childhood remains unanswered since informants were largely speculative about their earliest childhood years. Yet, however uncertain its origins, a number of informants did remember childhoods in which one sibling emerged as the interpreter between other siblings and parents. Harry explained how he talked with his parents:

> I'd get my sister to interpret what I was saying. I'd go, Tell them this or explain this to them. I mean, I could talk to them, but it was just easier to have Mary do it. I guess I was just lazy.

These communication imbalances among siblings often continued into adulthood and often mirrored issues concerning family relationships as well.

A Brother's Keeper

Discrepancies in language use and interpreting responsibilities within the family often compounded

relationships between siblings. In addition to interpreting, older siblings were more likely to assume roles frequently identified by both older and younger siblings as "parental." Laura explained: "I, being the oldest, I pretty much told them what to do and how to do things. It's like I was the mother hen." Frank spoke of the strained relationship he now has with his two younger brothers because they resented the fact that he -- not their parents -- raised them. Rita felt more positively toward her older sister:

> My older sister is my mother. She is like my mother. We've always been close...She would come to my school activities instead of my mother...It was wonderful having her as a mother. I didn't know that's what she was at the time, but it was nice.

Like many informants, Rita's description of her sibling vacillates between one which is more metaphoric and one which is indistinguishable from identifying her sibling as her parent.

Using parental terms to describe oneself or one's siblings appeared throughout many informants' narratives. In some ways, this is not remarkable. Older siblings -- whether their parents are hearing or deaf -- have often assumed certain kinds of family responsibilities. Yet, informants' interpretation of these responsibilities is clear: they are those of a parent. Why were certain activities necessarily identified as parental? What makes an activity that of a mother but not of a child or sibling? In the earlier example, Rita described her relationship with her sister: "It was

wonderful having her as a mother. I didn't know that's what she was at the time..." Rita's assessment was informed by her adult perspectives. Like many other informants, Rita explained that as an adult she learned "the way families are supposed to work."

Many other informants -- regardless of their birth order -- assessed their childhoods using similar descriptors.

> [Tony, an only child]: Sometimes I feel like I was the parent and I helped raise them [parents].
>
> [Gloria, the youngest of four]: We all did our part. Probably Maria [oldest child] had to do the most. But I did my part too, I did my part to help out. I got to learn how to be a mother real early.

In explaining their family relationships and roles, informants frequently used the terms and models of the dominant Hearing culture. Although this represents a satisfactory explanation of their childhood experiences for a number of informants, others felt coerced by its implications. Pam explained:

> Oh, the kids used to say things like, "Well, do you have to go home and change your mother's diapers?" And, I'd say, "No, but at least I know how to change a diaper. You probably still have your mother changing yours!"

Pam's retort suggests alternative ways of considering the parent-child relationship. The dominant cultural view presumes a heirarchical structure: the caretaking parent and the care-requiring child. Such views do not, for example, consider families in which responsibilities are assumed by appropriate family members as part of the family's resource system. Chapter 7, 'A Family Inside Out or Upside Down,'

expands this discussion of family roles and responsibilities, and the cultural models used to explain them.

Deaf Siblings

Although only 8 out of 150 informants had a deaf sibling, their narratives provide important perspectives. For most informants, the experiences of being a deaf child were part of a family history learned through their parents' stories. Informants with deaf siblings saw the developmental, social and educational issues of deaf children first-hand. Like any siblings, deaf and hearing brothers and sisters fought, played and learned from each other.

> I taught my sister how to dance...I gave her a sense of the music. And my sister is one of the best partners I have in terms of dancing. [Laughs.] And when I see her, we periodically will do it and we get such a kick out of it.

Informants with deaf siblings were far more likely to meet other deaf children. When they interpreted for their sibling, they were exposed to interactions and situations that differed from those when interpreting for their parents. These informants were more likely to develop sign language which included the vocabulary of a younger generation than informants whose main interaction was with their parents' peer group. These women and men also felt the frequent family disruptions when their brother or sister left home to attend a residential school.

Like deaf grandparents, a deaf brother or sister intensified the family connection to the Deaf world and often heightened an informant's sense of being the different one in the family. Deaf siblings expressed a difference unencumbered by generational differences between children and parents.

> My parents didn't understand a hearing child. They had my [deaf] sister, and my sister did things as they expected. And they knew the people she was doing things with. And they were part of her world, or she was part of their world -- however you want to look at it. I wasn't. I never was going to be. I wasn't deaf. I had a whole different world that I dealt with. And they didn't understand that world other than through me. And so I became the symbol for this whole other world which they didn't understand. And they didn't understand me.

Sibling relationships often became shaded by the overlay of being deaf or hearing.

> I always think of her as being my parents' pride and joy. And my sister, I think, thinks that I was given a lot because I could hear. That my parents were easy on me. And I think my parents were much harder on me because they really expected that much more of me.

Monica felt like she and her other hearing siblings always ended up leaving their deaf brother out -- no matter how hard they tried to include him.

> I don't know what we could have done. [Pauses for a long time.] Probably nothing. We just belonged to such different worlds.

A deaf sibling often illustrated the power differential between being hearing and being deaf. Even younger hearing siblings were often given responsibilities toward their deaf brother or sister.

> The other thing is my parents wanting my brother to speak. And because I could hear, they put me in the position of trying to teach my brother how to speak. And my brother hated it, to this day will not wear a hearing aid...And I'm sure my brother just resents that to this day. Because part of that is trying to make him like me. Which I don't think my parents meant. I just think that they thought that because I could hear and because I could say things that I could help my brother.

Reactions from hearing outsiders often proposed a preferential heirarchy.

> People would always say, Oh, you're so lucky, just think, instead of him [brother], it could have been you. You could have been the one born deaf.

Yet, sometimes the status of being hearing was undercut by a sense of being different from the rest of the family. As Lisa observed, sibling alignment as deaf or hearing often continued into adulthood.

> My brother married a hearing girl and they had a baby boy. The baby is profoundly deaf. And my brother wrote me a letter saying, 'I was so happy to find out that he was deaf because he will always be one of us'...They really do believe that if you're hearing, you're never part of them and you're part of a different world and you don't belong. You're not theirs.

Outcomes and Validation

In comparing how informants described various family members, informants as a whole were most varied when talking about their siblings:

> My sister is my closest friend.
>
> I haven't spoken with my brother in years. I don't care if I ever do.
>
> We fought all the time as kids.
>
> We were each other's support network.

The variation in intimacy or enmity between these siblings appears no different than among the general population (Bank and Kahn 1982). Yet, sibling relationships illustrate an important dimension to the cultural identity of these informants. Whatever combination of birth order, gender, temperament and historical context, each child had a distinct relationship with their parents. Within each family as well as among all these men and women, each informant developed a highly personal system of meaning. For some, having deaf parents also meant taking care of other siblings. For others, having deaf parents meant talking to them through another sibling. Some were compared to deaf siblings and elevated because they were hearing, while others were distanced because they were not deaf.

There were few contradictions in the overlapping histories of informants from the same family. Yet, emphases, explanations and interpretations of these histories did vary. Informants themselves often prefaced their remarks by recognizing the potential for variation in any one sibling's perspectives: each one had a different personality, had grown up at different times, and had different family roles. Sharon

offered this insight:

> My brother thinks everything was pathological. And I don't feel that way at all. And we're looking at the very same experiences, the very same situation, the very same people...but I don't feel that there's any way to put a label on it and say, That's the right answer. A lot of it is just up here [points] in our own little heads.

Despite these disclaimers, most informants continued to express concern over discrepancies between themselves and their siblings. Like many informants, Ben needed validation of the family history that he remembered:

> Sometimes I just can't believe that we remember things so differently. There are some things that I remember so clearly, but they can't even remember at all.

Ben's uneasiness and sense of urgency lies at the heart of identity. In understanding and defining who we are, we rely on our own sense of our histories as well as available explanatory models. What did deaf parents have to do with how these men and women turned out?

Siblings were one way for informants to explore their own hypotheses and validate their interpretations. In effect, comparisons and contrasts with siblings created early explanatory systems.

> All three of us [sisters] are so different, we have totally different issues. My oldest sister will drive down the freeway and she'll say, "Oh, I feel so bad because there's a deaf guy in jail and I didn't have time to interpret for him on Friday so he has to stay in jail all weekend." And my attitude is, He committed a crime, who the hell cares? It's not your responsibility to take care of deaf people. And my middle sister's different too... My middle sister always feels like she has to make sure everybody's included. And that's totally different from the way I look at it.

Ken and Shelly each explained how their parents' deafness propelled them both to succeed. They also described how their other two siblings developed low self-esteem because of this same family feature. In assessing how family responsibilities affected her, Barbara continually referred to her sister as "the rebellious one" and herself as "the good one." Siblings underscore informants' dilemma of interpreting their family history. Whether first-born, last-born or only child, the singular perspective of each informant was often undermined by its very uniqueness. The opportunities for comparison with others -- whether siblings or other hearing children of deaf parents -- could potentially invalidate a long-held system of beliefs and explanations about having deaf parents.

Chapter 5 Summary

During the interviews and during group meetings of adult hearing children, I often observed these men and women attempting to find common explanations for their lives. For many, it was the first adult opportunity to consider what having deaf parents meant. Many of these outcomes fit particular individuals but conflicted with the experiences of others: "I don't trust anyone." "I trust everyone." "I have low self-esteem." "I feel very self-confident." When these men and women failed to find consensus, they frequently considered possible explanations for these divergent outcomes. One of the most common considerations was family composition:

only child, eldest child, youngest child, deaf siblings, middle child. Although these subgroups did have common themes, contradictions arose. Only children were generally very responsible, but some turned out fastidious while others were slobs. Informants and subgroups reshuffled their explanations and often subdivided again.

This categorical narrowing does offer some important points of distinction among informants. As the past four chapters have shown, family members and family histories provide one framework in which to understand these informants' experiences: how each parent dealt with and experienced their deafness; whether grandparents or siblings were deaf; an informant's birth order; isolation from hearing people or interaction with other deaf people. Yet, more often, these logistical explanations for individual outcomes lead to an intellectual quagmire of contradictions. Rather than continue to pursue some elusive feature which will explain all outcomes, the next section turns to the day-to-day experiences of being a hearing child with deaf parents. The following four chapters include not only routine features but informants' childhood and adult emotional responses. Despite the variation in individual circumstances, these features provide a much more unified tone and perspective on the lives and the identities of these women and men.

SECTION III: CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPES

Introduction to Section III: Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9

Arlene's Story:

When we'd go shopping, I got lost I don't know how many times. Man, when I got lost, I got lost! People would come up to me and say, "Can I help you? I'm sure we can find your Momma and Daddy." And I'm thinking, well just you try. Let's see you call them over the PA system. And knowing my mother, the way she shopped, it would be a while before she found out I wasn't there.

This one time, we were travelling and we pulled up at a filling station and I was asleep in the back seat. My mother was looking at this roadmap while my father was in the restroom. I woke up and I told my mother I was going to the bathroom. So, when I came back from the bathroom, the car was gone. I was only five or six and I was scared to death. I just started crying and the gas station man said, "What's wrong?" I said, "My Momma and Daddy drove off!" He said, "Oh, they'll be right back soon as they notice things are so quiet and you're not talking with them." I said, But you don't understand. They don't hear anything, they're deaf.

It turned out they didn't get that far, maybe five or six miles down the road before they noticed. They said it was a good thing I had rolled down my window

> because it was the air that made this wind in the car and my Daddy finally turned around to see what it was and saw that I was gone. Otherwise, who knows how long it would have been.
>
> I got lost lots of other times too. [At this point Arlene sighed, her eyes filling with tears. Her voice began to break.] And I know when my parents are gone, I know I'm really gonna feel lost again.

Since beginning this research, I travelled over 58,000 miles -- almost 9,000 miles of them driving alone across the American countryside. For nearly 12 months, I criss-crossed a landscape altered by geography and by season. I met informants at home, at work and on the run. A punk cafe on the North side of Chicago; a rocky beach on the Pacific; a tavern in the rural South; a sprawling suburban mansion in the NorthEast. Vigotsky (1988) proposes that each child

> ...grows and develops in an extremely individual cultural-social environment which reflects the complex path of the historical development of the given people and the complex system of economic and cultural conditions of its present-day existence (p. 103).

Considering the diverse lives of these 150 men and women, are there unifying features within their childhood landscapes? In the previous four chapters, informants' narratives about their family members provided glimpses of the historical

contexts and social forces which contributed to the experience of being a hearing child of deaf parents. This Section shifts from reflections of identity in others to informants' own remembered experiences. It focuses on the routine yet distinct landmarks of their childhood, and on the emotional threads which connect these childhood experiences to their present adult lives. As Arlene's story illustrates, many informants' feelings about their childhood and their parents were not merely lodged in descriptive memoirs of the past. These on-going responses were very much a part of their adult life, often emerging during the interviews as well. Sumner, Bateson and others used the concept of 'ethos' to describe what Clifton (1976) calls "the dominant emotional aspects of consciousness which color and give quality to different behaviors observed in a community" (p. 152). Each of the four chapters in Section III is organized around major themes which are both evocative and persistent: communication, family roles, difference, and dichotomization. The intensity as well as the response to each of these issues varies among informants. Yet, it is the recurrence of these themes -- despite the diversity in informants' age, locale or family circumstances -- which demonstrates a remarkably consistent topography and a unifying ethos among this population. Section III begins with a Chapter on Communication, which forms the basis for many family experiences as well as a cultural boundary. Chapters on family roles, difference and

SECTION III: CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPES

CHAPTER 6: A SONG YOU NEVER HEARD BEFORE

> [Rafael:] Sure, everybody's different than their parents. But there's this one thing -- I don't exactly know how to describe it. It's like we [signs 'look into'] like we see into the deaf world because of them, but we're also hearing. And, no matter how hard either of us tries, they can't ever be hearing and we can't ever be deaf...I don't know, it's like when I try to explain music to my parents. My Mom is always wanting me to explain music. And if your parents aren't deaf, you can't understand. It's like me telling you about a song you never heard before. I can try all sorts of ways, but until you hear it, you can never really know what it's like. Not really. [Shakes his head and signs 'can't'].

Introduction to Chapter 6

Rafael sat cross-legged on the floor of his living room trying to explain the difference between being deaf and being hearing. Imperceptibly, he shifted to trying to explain his own life. At the heart of Rafael's narrative is his concern with communication -- trying to express feelings, convey information, share experiences. What does it take to communicate with others? Is there some inevitable wall which exists no matter what the subject, no matter how skilled the presenter, no matter who the audience? Must each of us acknowledge that all communication is ultimately flawed -- is it, as Rafael describes, like trying to explain "a song...never heard before"?

It would be easy to overestimate the significance of sign language among hearing children of deaf parents. In fact, one-fifth of all informants did not use ASL or any other sign

system.[1] Yet, despite varying language competencies and language uses among informants, these men and women shared a more elemental arena of communication: sound and silence. These two aspects of communication were part of informants' daily lives, present in their most ordinary routines. This Chapter begins by examining sound and silence -- two properties which some might consider common-sense and second-nature. Yet, informants' narratives reveal that even these supposed universals are subject to cultural interpretation. And, because informants incorporate the cultural systems of the hearing and of the deaf, their understandings of sound and of silence reflect this dual and often conflicting heritage.

Following the discussions of cultural variation in sound and silence, this Chapter turns to particular modes of language -- speech, writing, signs, gestures, facial expressions and body movements -- which are also evaluated and prioritized within a cultural context. In particular, 'talking' is seen as a culturally defined method of communication which determines not only how informants express themselves to others but shapes preferences for how others communicate with them. The remainder of the Chapter examines informants' relationship to the languages of English and American Sign Language, and the implications of being bilingual among two languages which emerge from such

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[1] This included not only informants whose parents were oral, but several whose parents' primary form of communication was ASL.

fundamentally opposing extremes of sound and silence.

Language

Language has been hailed as a distinctly human mode of communication -- considered by many to be the primary attribute of our species. Within both Arts and Sciences, language has provided a mirror for the broader culture as well as the individual soul. Writers have collaborated and argued over the relationship between language and self. Whorf and Sapir described the interrelatedness of language and thought while others proposed their arbitrariness.[2] The particular language and the uses of language within a child's early environment are universally recognized as significant influences on psychosocial development.[3] Studies have examined language shift and language maintenance, the relationship between language and gender, language and personality. Despite this vast and sometimes conflicting array of language theories, researchers and writers share a nearly universal bias. The studies and the expressions of language all presume one element, one which has implicitly

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[2] Cole (1982) defines language as comprising "a set of symbols and a set of rules (a grammar) used in a meaningful way that permits communication. The symbols are expressed orally by sounds, or they can be communicated in a written form" (p. 3).

[3] Shore (1989) suggests that the meanings of cultural symbols change how a child thinks, speaks and feels -- depending upon the specific cultural modes of language, competence, and interpersonal relations.

been incorporated within the domain of 'language' for both researcher and layperson. It is a quality simple in its recognition and profound by its absence: Sound.

Hockett (1960) identified thirteen design features which set language apart from other forms of communication. According to Hockett, the first criterion of language is that it is a vocal-auditory channel of communication: produced through the mouth and/or nose, heard through the ears. This fixation with sound extends to writing as well. "True writing," Henderson (1976) observes "is more commonly considered a surrogate for language -- a system of graphic signs which conveys the equivalent of spoken communication" (p. 409). Equating language with sound is not merely the province of the researcher. Common terms and synonyms associated with language indicate the persuasiveness of this association: 'speaker,' 'listener,' 'talk', 'speech.' Grosjean (1982) finds that the United States is generally more tolerant of linguistic minorities, but he also observes

> Although the official policy toward linguistic minorities has been neither one of encouragement nor one of repression but more a policy of toleration, the general attitude of the nation (as compared to its laws) and of the Anglo-American majority has been that members of linguistic minorities should integrate themselves into the English-speaking society as quickly as possible (p. 62).

The expected assimilation is not merely toward a particular language, but a <u>spoken</u> language. Within contemporary American culture, the belief in sound as the basis for language and for communication has achieved unquestioned supremacy. This

belief appears to be shared by many other cultures as well.[4]

Within the past two decades American Sign Language has begun to challenge traditional assumptions about the fundamental elements of language (Woodward 1972; Klima and Bellugi 1979; Padden and Humphries 1988). American Sign Language (ASL) has emerged from intriguing curiosity to recognition as a complete and separate language.[5] ASL is no longer considered a step-child of English, deficient in neither abstraction nor nuance.[6] Although ASL has developed a sizable research following, many of these studies are oriented to linguistic analyses and classifications. Ironically, linguistic recognition of American Sign Language was precipitated largely on the basis of its inherent structural and morphological characteristics -- qualities which are considered fundamental to more traditional sound-oriented languages. While the growing acceptance and recognition of ASL is an important milestone of Deaf history,

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[4] Very little cross-cultural research exists on the comparative value of sound in other cultures. My own brief studies in other countries (Australia, Italy, Mexico, Israel, Ecuador) indicate that spoken language is the preferred although not necessarily exclusive mode of communication.

[5] This does not extend to other "sign" systems (such as SEE or Signed English) which are based on spoken English. These systems are generally not used conversationally among deaf people.

[6] Many countries have their own independent Sign Languages. This includes distinct sign languages among those countries which share a spoken language (e.g., the English-speaking countries of the United States, Australia, and England do <u>not</u> share a common Sign Language).

its identification and classification as a bona fide language has glossed over a more fundamental feature of ASL. Whatever its similarities to other languages might be, ASL is not a _spoken_ language. It is not based on _sound_.

Silence

As a reminder of the dangers of inaction, gay activists have introduced a slogan which echoes the horrors of the Holocaust: Silence = Death. Those of us who do not speak out are lost. Promotional ads for the movie _Alien_ warned "In space, no one can hear you scream." Cloaked in passivity and darkness, silence has come to mean the opposite of sound, of communication, of life. Paradoxically, silence also brings respite from a hectic and overstimulating life. A moment of silence. Silence is golden. Unless we are given clues to the character of silence -- "chilling," "peaceful," "ominous" -- how are we to know what it means? Both ambiguous and paradoxical, silence embodies a void without shape and without meaning. All these versions of silence reflect a world of hearing people, a world of sound.

Silence has also become synonymous with deaf people. Explicit titles on the Deaf such as _They Grow in Silence_, _Growing Old in Silence_, _The Other Side of Silence_ and _In Silence_ or implicit ones such as _Outsiders in a Hearing World_ and _When the Mind Hears_ draw from this association. For most people, the pairing of deafness and silence is innate. Like

many informants, Roger recalled a typical response when someone found out his parents were deaf: "Oh, it must have been so quiet around your house." A later section in this Chapter describes how deaf households, in fact, were often <u>not</u> quiet and how sound was quite familiar in the everyday lives of deaf people and their children. This section, however, keeps its focus on this presumed realm of the Deaf: Silence. Given the often paradoxical and ambivalent meanings attached to silence from those who hear, what place does silence have in the lives of these informants -- men and women who stand within the crossroads of Hearing and Deaf cultures?

The Deaf community has often embraced the association with silence -- in national newsletters such as 'Silent News,' 'Silent Worker,' 'Silent Advocate,' -- or in the names of Deaf clubs like The Silent Club. The sign for silence is among the most fluid and beautiful of signs: both hands held prayer-like over the mouth, then slowly and steadily spreading apart and downward. A related sign is 'peace'. When describing their parents' attitudes about silence, informants frequently invoked a state of serenity without any sense of doom or lack of communication. Although recognizing the advantages of certain environmental sounds such as a siren or loudspeaker, many informants explained how their parents equated sound with noise -- bothersome, obtrusive, and sometimes morally corrupt. Donna explained

> My Mom always told me she was glad she couldn't hear all that noise. All those bad ugly things people say all the time. She was glad she didn't have to deal with it.

Many informants echoed their parents' positive associations with silence. In a passage about being "stone deaf," Sidransky (1990) elevates silence to a near-glorified state. Several informants were similarly militant in their defense of silence.

Silence also characterized interactions between informants' deaf families and hearing people. Instead of tranquility, here silence often represented an uneasy and awkward stillness. Such silence came from both hearing and deaf people. Hearing people who were unsure how to talk with deaf people. Deaf people who became unusually guarded about any attempts at sound. Carl explained:

> Oh, I don't know, it just feels too quiet. It's not the same as when Mom and Dad are talking. I mean, they don't use their voices, but it's not that quiet. It's like they're being careful not to sound funny or make any wrong noises.

Padden and Humphries (1988) note that ordinarily "the lives of Deaf people are far from silent but very loudly click, buzz, swish, pop, roar and whir" (p. 109). Tanya had been describing the lack of communication between her parents and her hearing relatives:

> Everybody's standing around but nobody's talking. And I get this urge, I feel this pull to break the silence. It's funny, even though I get mad about being the interpreter, it's almost better than facing the silence.

Several informants similarly mentioned a pressure to fill this void of silence. Lorraine explained that she was made always

anxious by her ex-husband's silence.

> I kept thinking that something was wrong. God! He was too quiet. But I kept nagging him to say something. It used to drive me up the wall. And then this one time he had the nerve to say, "Well, you mean with your deaf parents and all that you aren't used to this by now?"

When informants used silence to characterize social interactions, it often expressed not the self-possessed environment of the deaf but a level of social discomfort -- and one which often signaled them into action.

An even darker side of silence emerged among some informants' narratives. In contrast to visions of silence as peaceful or discomforting, for some informants silence was desolate and terrifying. Some of the most difficult and poignant moments during these interviews concerned informants' very personal memories of silence. John remembered falling when he was a young child, unable to call out for his mother.

> I wanted to call out, but I wasn't able to. I just had to cry until the pain was over. I never got to call out.

After an hour of being guardedly positive about her family experiences, Celine risked sharing her most secret childhood fear. She spoke to me as she would have to her deaf parents, in a voice that was both woman and child, deaf and hearing:

> Why can't you hear me? Why you deaf? I scream, you don't come. Why can't you hear me? Why you deaf?

Douglas explained to me why he would never have a deaf spouse or lover:

> I know what some people would say. They'd tell you they wouldn't do it because they don't want to always have to be the interpreter or something like that. But that's not it for me. For me, when someone's lying next to me in the dark, I want to be able to talk to them, I want to know that they can hear me. I want to know that they're there. I don't want to be alone, just surrounded by the darkness.

Feelings of hurt, of fear, of isolation. Although they did not represent the majority view, these versions of silence push at the limits of cultural relativity. Is there a fundamental human need for sound? Do these descriptions of silence suggest intrinsic deficiencies in deaf parenting of hearing children? How does one reconcile these disturbing images of silence with those which picture a rhapsodic serenity?

Anthropologists have been concerned not only with the real, the tangible -- but the perceived. It is what each informant brings to the realm of silence which gives it form and meaning. In _Illness as Metaphor_ Susan Sontag (1977) criticized the metaphoric use of illness for a host of negative images ranging from war to decay.[7] Yet, disease and silence _are_ metaphors because they express feelings which Sontag and others disdain: the lyrical, the magical, the amorphous. It is precisely these properties which reflect the complexity and the contradictions of the human condition.

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[7] Sontag passionately demands that disease be stripped of historical and literary fabrication and become, not euphemisms, but factual descriptions of biological conditions and processes. Yet, Sontag reclaims the myth of reductionism: disease is merely a reorganization of irreducible biological phenomena.

Whether their parents used sign or lipreading, all informants recognized silence does not preclude communication. The question, however, is how effective is that communication? From within their lives and their families, communication has come to mean more than auditory production and reception. The fundamental basis of communication is not sound -- but connection. Not only whether one is able to express, but also whether one is heard. For Douglas, both aspects were essential.

> I want to be able to talk to them, I want to know that they can hear me. I want to know that they're there. I don't want to be alone, just surrounded by the darkness.

Deaf people, in fact, can communicate in the dark.[8] Varying modes of communication -- spoken or signed, written or drawn -- are evaluated according to differing cultural standards. But they are also experienced by individual people. Metaphors like silence demonstrate not merely cognitive associations. They express actual experiences and preferences. Being "heard" is not only metaphoric for being understood. For the message to be heard, it must be given in a particular mode of communication -- whether by preference or by necessity. For most of us, the range of communication depends on cultural sanction, familiarity and skill. Within both hearing and the deaf worlds, strong adherents exist -- those who elevate

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[8] There are several ways to communicate in the dark including fingerspelling into the other person's hand or placing the other person's hands on your hands as you sign. These and other techniques are also used by deaf-blind individuals.

clarity of voice, those who ennoble the expressions of hand and body. And for some, no mode of communication is sufficient. Success and failure are known within all modes of communication.

Metaphors of silence reflect two differing cultures: a hearing culture which reveres sound as the basis for communication, and a deaf culture which sees sound as an inessential and often unnecessary ingredient of communication. Informants' metaphors and experiences of silence draw from this dual heritage. For many, silence represents a realm of comfort without alienation, a familiar place of refuge. For some, silence is a reminder of the anxiety and fear of not being heard -- regardless of mode of communication. Among all these men and women, silence is a familiar presence. Informants were routinely reminded of it by their own acute awareness of sound and by outsiders who pitied and marveled at their family of silence. Silence draws from the most profound depths of these informants' experiences. Revered or reviled, the shapeless forms of silence remain notable features within informants' childhood and adult landscapes.

Sound

In Deaf in America, Padden and Humphries (1988) dedicate a chapter to 'The Meaning of Sound.' They describe two ways to think about sound: as an acoustic event, and as various meanings associated with that event. To paraphrase their

example, a cough (comparable to Geertz' wink)[9] can mean a variety of things depending on the context: clearing the windpipe, disapproval, or a signal. Padden and Humphries point out that the Deaf are no strangers to the world of sound, but "Deaf people know that sound belongs to hearing people except in the few situations they are allowed to use it" (p. 103). Deaf people must carefully learn the complex and varying meanings of sounds. This is possible through control: self-control and being controlled by others.

In navigating the confusing and potentially self-incriminating world of sound, many deaf parents relied on their hearing children for guidance. Hearing children provided their parents with glimpses of sounds which were both subtle and routine. How do the songs of the canary and mockingbird compare? What causes a floor to creak? Dorothy told me that she became aware of how profound her mother's lack of hearing was when her mother asked if the sound from a drop of water was made when the drop came out of the faucet or when the drop hit the sink. Sidransky (1990) remembered her mother wondering if a yellow tulip had a sound of its own. Monitoring the sounds of and around their parents in public was a common occurrence for most informants. In public settings, sound was often experienced negatively -- cause for either embarrassment or alarm. Your voice is too loud. The

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[9] C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Culture. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

car's making a funny noise. Your shoes squeak. There was a loud crash over there. As Leonard pointed out, the origins of these responsibilities were often unclear. Were these efforts on behalf of the deaf parent or the hearing child?

> I got so used to telling my father to hush, you know, when he got too loud. I'd always [signs, 'Too loud, noisy, quiet!']. But one day I noticed that he seemed hurt when I told him. And I thought, Well, who am I doing this for?

Regardless for whom sounds were regulated in public, they invariably became tinged with a sense of caution and control.

At home, some of the rules of sound changed. While screening for urgency or danger continued, informants could now be less concerned with stigma than with interest, amusement or danger. All those noises inside and outside the family home. A burbling toilet, a creaking mattress, ticking clocks, dogs barking. Which one is worth noting, which one signifies important information? In some families, screening sounds and alerting parents were shared or alternated among siblings; in other families, one child took on the main responsibility. Evaluating sounds often tied informants to their family even when they were not home. Don remembered

> When the [tornado] sirens went off I had to run home and tell my parents. After a while the neighbors would tell them, and you just kind of know that your neighbors will. But there's always that scary part, Well, what if the neighbors aren't home?

Screening home sounds continued to be a part of many informants' adult obligations as well.

> I went to visit them [parents] one time and when I walked in I asked my Dad, What on earth is that noise? It turned out the alarm on their clock had been stuck for who knows how long. He smiled and said, "Well, it doesn't bother us."

Another informant described this incident:

> When I heard on the news that there were these flash flood warnings, I called my parents [in another state]. At first I couldn't get through and I panicked and thought, Oh God, what if something already happened.

The home environment also released the usually hidden voices of the deaf. High-pitched, gruff, unmodulated, these deaf voices were unbridled by propriety or custom and became pure expressions of unrestrained anger or laughter. Deaf voices clearly illustrate the contrast between public and private domains. As children, many informants remembered cringing when their parents' voices were heard in public.[10] Informants' expressed embarrassment or anger when others mocked their parents' voices. This contrasts with informants descriptions within the home. Here, deaf voices were familiar and often comforting. Evelyn remembered her mother's lullaby fondly:

> I still remember the way my mother would tuck me in at night. I was just a little girl, and my mother would come in and sit on the edge of my bed and begin to sing to me. [Evelyn started to imitate her mother's voice but she began to choke up.] Her voice was so beautiful. [As she started to cry, Evelyn suddenly stopped and looked at me.] How dare they make fun of our parents' voices! How dare they!

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[10] This did not include public Deaf events in which most informants were unconcerned about their parents' voices.

Technology introduced the outside world of sound into the home -- through radios, telephones and televisions. The presence of these telecommunication and media devices among all informants' family homes varied, depending on historical and economic factors. Some older informants remembered none of these devices within their childhood home; all three were routine among most younger informants. Although each piece of equipment ultimately differs in its specific use and in its accessability to the deaf, all three touched upon the family's response to sound and to communication. A number of informants explained how their parents specifically bought radios and televisions for them as young children. Whether these devices actually helped these hearing children to talk touches upon a fundamental disagreement within linguistics: whether language is essentially innate (as proposed by Chomsky and others) or whether interaction and human modeling are essential for language development. As the psycholinguist Miller (1992) reminds us, "The trouble with language acquisition is that the nativists have proved that it's a mystery and the environmentalists have proved that it's impossible" (p. 51). It should be noted that those few informants who remembered no radios, telephones, television or persons who used spoken English within their early childhood homes <u>still</u> developed spoken English skills. In all these cases, however, these men and women had initially developed sign language skills. Since these children did not exist in

a language-deprived environment, the apparently spontaneous development of spoken language is more reasonably an indication of transferrable language skills from sign language to spoken English rather than an indication of innate language ability.

Side-stepping the question of spoken language development, these machines were, however, sources of information for the entire family. Sound-based technologies also acknowledged the hearing child's separate heritage while reinforcing the culturally sanctioned modes of speaking and hearing. For some parents and their children, these inventions were unwelcome intrusions, continual reminders of the differences between being hearing and being deaf. Wanda described how she would turn the radio off whenever her parents came to visit: "I guess I just felt too guilty." Some informants described these devices as increasing their interpreting responsibilities or further exasperating their attempts to explain sound:

> It's one thing to try to sign a song with words, but what are you gonna do when its just music? I mean, there's only so many ways you can go -- loud, soft, fast, slow. After a while, you've kinda covered it.

A number of informants, however, described how their parents encouraged them to explore sound through music and speech. Dennis reasoned that it was as if "they could hear through me."

Control over the volume and selection of programs on radio and to some degree television placed the hearing child

in a unique position of power -- although some informants reported how their parents were quite adept at regulating their children's activities.

> I used to keep the radio on after I was supposed to be asleep. My father came in and saw the little red light was on so he made me turn it off. A few nights later, I kept the radio on but this time, I hid it under my blanket. When my father came in, I turned it off. But my father reached down and felt the radio. He could feel it was still warm, so he knew I had been using it. Every night he took the radio away and gave it back to me the next morning.

Surprisingly, however, many informants supervised themselves:

> The first thing other kids would say is, Oh, boy, you can turn up the radio at your house as loud as you want. But I never did, me or my brother.

As with phone interpreting (see Chapter 7, pp. 193-194) many informants saw self-monitoring as an extremely moral responsibility -- not wanting to cheat their parents who were often perceived as deceived by the hearing world. These actions also reflected the family's responses to sounds: they are to be monitored and controlled.

Throughout their portrayals of their parents inquisitiveness or responses to sound, informants rarely revealed feelings of loss or longing. However, informants themselves were saddened and occasionally frustrated by how cut off their parents were from sound. Martha told me, "I just keep thinking, my father will never hear my voice. Never know that part of me."

Talking

One of the most frequent reactions when people found out informants' parents were deaf was "How did you learn to talk?" Along with the term 'deaf and dumb,' few responses provoked as much anger and sense of insult among informants. Although I, too, had often brushed off this remark, as a researcher I now pondered the apparent common-sensical nature of this inquiry. How, in fact, did hearing children of deaf parents learn to talk? And, why was this question so offensive?

"Let's Talk" is one of the cornerstone phrases of modern life -- whether over lunch, around the conference table, or lying in bed with your partner. Learning to talk is a major milestone in a child's development; DeVos (1973) suggests that American mothers emphasize verbal communication as a means of instilling independence in their infants. From talk therapy to talk shows, talking is a significant aspect of information, individual expression and social connection. The previous sections on silence and sound described how these two features vary in cultural meanings and in social use. While valuable forms of communication, neither sound nor silence can be considered languages. Talking is identified as a special form of communication: a language shared among human beings. The major bias of hearing culture has been to limit "talking" to producing an audible language. This prescribes not only how things are expressed but how they are received.

In addition to the spoken word, Edward Hall (1959)

included two more dimensions to human communication: space and time. He demonstrated how both of these were important features of communication which varied regionally and culturally. Surprisingly, despite the title of his work -- The Silent Language -- Hall's discussion did not include sign languages. More recently, an enormous body of research on sign languages has emerged -- much of it concerning language acquisition and development, linguistic structures and morphology, and human memory. As has been pointed out, nearly one-fifth of all informants did not sign. The reasons for this will be discussed shortly. However, regardless of their personal use and fluency in sign language, all informants were aware of sign language as an alternative communication system.[11] The next section will consider the subset of informants who were bi-lingual. This section explores informants' overall experiences of talking -- which includes a wide range of auditory and sign language systems. Is there a difference in how these differing modes of communication were used? What expectations and interpretations did informants bring to each situation? What does "talking" mean?

When I first tried to develop a matrix of communication modes for informants and their family members, I was overwhelmed with a endlessly complex and confusing layout. Initial modes were identified as speaking, sign language, and

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[11] Here, the term 'sign' is used more generically to include not only ASL but fingerspelling, home-made signs, and other forms of non-oral communication.

lipreading. These expanded to include one-handed and two-handed fingerspelling, American Sign Language, various English-based sign language systems (SEE, Signed English, SimCom), homesigns, pantomiming, lipreading with and without voice. The choice of communication mode often varied between informant and each parent, between parents, among siblings and parents, and over time. Particular situations often determined the technique chosen. Tod's job as a church interpreter illustrates this diversity of communication.

> I'd shift back and forth, sometimes ASL, sometimes mouth the words, sometimes use fingerspelling. You know, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. ["So, how many different kinds of sign would you use?"] Gosh, I don't know, five, six, you know, probably as many different kinds as there were deaf people.

The multiplicity of options and uses occurred not only when comparing one family with another, but often within a single family. In abandoning my attempts to develop a reasonable communication matrix, I realized that the complexity and diversity of styles and modes of talking was itself a significant feature among this population.

While suggesting resourcefulness and flexibility, the assorted ways of talking among hearing children and their deaf parents sometimes confounded communication. Although recognizing the apparent diversity of sign languages, the editor of American Annals of the Deaf (1990) hypothesized that all sign language systems fell into two basic categories: "Whether they were based on written or spoken English or whether they had developed outside of the educational setting

independent of English" (p. 201). Present data from informants, however, indicates this is a gross oversimplification. Although many informants were proficient in more than one communication mode, this was not true among all family members, relatives, and family friends. Among this broader group, each system differed enough to be unintelligible to those not familiar with it. Communication modes were frequently dyadic, and these separate systems often precluded a holistic interaction -- even within individual families.

> My father used mostly ASL, but my mother could use ASL or sometimes fingerspelling. My brother didn't know ASL but he could fingerspell... He and I talked, but when he talked to my father he would use, I guess, home signs.

A number of informants evaluated their own ability and/or their siblings' abilities to communicate with their parents as insufficient and inadequate. What contributed to this communication quagmire, and how did it affect informants?

In Life with Two Languages, Grosjean (1982) describes how the dominant language opposes secondary languages. Although Grosjean generally confines his study to spoken languages, this opposition seems to consistently place sign language at the bottom of the language totem pole -- regardless of cultural setting or the particular dominant language. In the United States, sign language has had a long history of educational opposition and denigration. Over the years, educational tactics toward sign language have shifted from

acceptance to annihilation to forced assimilation.[12] This history is reflected in informants' descriptions of their family communication systems. Informants in their 60's and 70's reported American Sign Language was an acceptable form of talking -- among their parents as schoolchildren as well as within their childhood families.[13] This contrasts with middle aged and younger informants who remember their parents' vivid stories of the antagonism and oppression of sign language.

Critics have faulted sign language for having limited vocabulary particularly with regard to emotions and abstractions. However, much of this is based on English approximations by non-native speakers unable to grasp its complexity and its nuance. Several informants explained how they too had dismissed the form of talking used at home:

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[12] Lane (1984) chronicles how professional acceptance of sign language in America gradually shifted after the 1880 Congress of Milan. At this international conference on educational methods for deaf people, Lane details how unrealistic and often deceptive claims were made for the benefits of oralism.

[13] Groce (1985) similarly reports acceptance of sign language in the Nineteenth Century community of Martha's Vineyard which had a high incidence of deafness. Her research supports a normative view of deafness when it is a commonplace condition and not ostracized because of communication preferences.

> I just thought my mother wasn't as smart because she couldn't speak or use English very well. I used to correct her English all the time. It wasn't until I went to an interpreter training program last year that I learned about sign language. I never gave my mother credit for knowing a foreign language, and she passed away two years ago and I never told her [breaks down crying]. I just wish I could tell her how beautiful it was.

The attempts to abolish or reform sign language not only promoted secretive and guarded attitudes towards this form of talking, but contributed to the proliferation of diverse and often incompatible communication systems -- between generations and between family members.

Despite this history of linguistic oppression, nearly half of all informants described American Sign Language as their first or primary childhood language.[14] This was true of informants of all ages. While the number of informants who talked in sign is a tribute to the resiliency and perseverance of deaf people and sign language, there remains a more problematic picture. Twenty-one informants reported that although their parents principal language was sign language, they themselves did not know or use sign language as children.[15] Another fifty-six informants reported that although they used sign language, one or more of their siblings did not know or were not fluent in sign language --

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[14] As will be discussed in the next section on bilingualism, the designation of a language as the first or primary childhood language does not necessarily correlate with fluency, adult usage or attitudes toward that language.

[15] Almost three-fourths of this group of informants learned sign language as adults.

even though this was the principal language used by their parents. Two informants offered contrasting explanations for why hearing children of deaf parents did not learn sign language:

> A lot of hearing children of deaf parents that I know don't sign -- even though their parents stand around and try to communicate with them. A lot of the kids are like [signs and mouths exaggeratedly, "I don't want to learn."] And they're embarrassed and they're angry. They're very angry they have deaf parents. The whole business. And the parents could teach them until they're blue in the face. And the kid is like, "I'm not going to learn."

> I don't believe it when I hear that they [hearing kids] refused to learn sign. I believe that parents teach you from the day you are born. I feel like my Mom did...We're talking about communicating -- from the day you're born. A child that's only a few months old doesn't decide whether or not he wants to learn sign language. It comes from the parents. And if there's negative feelings about sign language, then maybe we should ask where it's coming from.

Both of these explanations express the insidious stigmatization of certain forms of talking which pervaded the lives of many hearing children, their deaf parents and the larger society.[16] Fragmented family communication not only affected some informants' ability to talk with their parents, it often strained sibling relationships by creating communication imbalances among them (see Chapter 5). These

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[16] Gardner and Lambert (1972) found that mastering a second language depends not so much on the person's intellectual capacity or language aptitude but rather on the person's attitude toward the other linguistic group and his or her willingness to identify with that group.

family situations parallel other minority language groups. Ervin-Tripp (1973; 1977), Grosjean (1982) and others emphasize cultural attitudes, the particular setting, and individual attitudes which cause individuals to choose one language over another -- rather than the inherent properties of the language itself. True diglossia -- which Grosjean (1982) defines as "a situation in which two languages...have very precise and distinct functions, so the bilingual speaker has little leeway in deciding which to use" -- is felt to be extremely rare." (p. 130). Within the family experiences of many informants, speaking and signing represent just such inalterable choices.

Among informants, "talking" encompasses a diverse and complex system of communication. In response to the question of how they learned to talk, most informants cited various hearing relatives or neighbors or playmates. Seven informants remembered having no speaking people around them during their first few years of childhood; nevertheless, they developed spoken English. Only 14 out of 150 informants reported needing speech therapy or special classes because of language problems. Many of these questioned whether their spoken language development could have been resolved without remediation:

> Boy, they could see me coming. That deaf and dumb couple's kid. The minute he says one thing wrong, yank him and put him in speech therapy.

Studies by Chomsky, Shore (1989) and others propose an innate schema for language learning. Whether this extends to spoken

language is uncertain, and is not answerable within the confines of present data.

Even among the majority of informants who experienced no spoken language problems, the question of learning to "talk" was often felt to have negative implications. Some resented the insinuation that they came from an abnormal family:

> Everybody always asks, "How did you learn to talk." And I would say, Well, I learned to <u>sign</u> when I was a few months old. When did you learn to sign?

Another informant:

> They might as well ask, "Well, when did you become normal?"

For many, "talking" was inextricably identified as using spoken English, and such associations often resurrected the shadow of linguistic oppression which had very personal family consequences. Albert explained his parents' dilemma:

> I know they thought they were doing it for me. Not teaching me sign so I would fit in, so I could talk. But it created a wall between us. It pisses me off. How could you do this to your son?

And for many, the question of learning to talk was ultimately unanswerable: "You know, I really don't know. I know it happened. But I haven't got a clue how." For most of us who identify talking as speaking, our recollections reflect a culturally acceptable schema, a generic process so seemingly natural that few question how it happened. Yet, Ambron (1975) describes how no one can actually answer the question of how he or she learned to talk: "None of us has the faintest recollection of how he learned to speak -- perhaps for the

very reason that memories cannot persist in the absence of linguistic tags" (p. 135). For many of the women and men interviewed, however, the question of "talking" was neither obvious nor straightforward. This simple question often touches on sensitive memories of linguistic oppression, miscommunication and insinuations of difference. The inquiry also reveals a bias which most people are unaware of: which kind of "talking" do you mean?

Bilingual Options

The legacy of stigmatization and linguistic repression of sign language clouds a fundamental issue of talking: what is the difference between speaking and signing?[17] Grosjean (1982) proposes that because most deaf people never master spoken English, it is only their hearing children who may be truly bilingual. Recent studies on adult hearing children of deaf parents have examined the linguistic phenomenon of code-switching[18] -- that is, which language(s) are used in which situations. Many of these studies have relied primarily on adults who are professional interpreters -- that is, those who

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[17] Wilcox (1989) discusses the overfocus on hands in studies of sign language. He describes hands as a modality rather than the language itself: "Signing is not a language but only a means of producing (utterances of) a language" (p. 182).

[18] DiPietro (1977) defines code-switching as "the use of more than one language by communicants in the execution of a speech act" (p. 8).

are reasonably fluent in sign language. However, following Ervin-Tripp, Grosjean and others, bilingualism is used here to describe the functional use of two languages rather than fluency in two languages. Previous definitions also excluded those who may have primarily receptive bilingualism, a characteristic common to many children of immigrant parents. Seventeen informants described themselves as having little or no expressive sign language as children, but able to understand at least some signing. A functional definition of bilingualism encompasses a broader population of informants who used speaking and some form of signing -- regardless of their fluency in either language. 122 of the 150 informants described themselves as using or understanding more than one language within their families.

During the interviews, a number of informants used both speaking and signing -- although rarely simultaneously.[19] As will be discussed, the differing uses of signing and speaking generally supported informants' differing historical and emotional associations with each language. The present section, however, does not focus on specific instances of code-switching among informants. Instead, this section adopts a symbolic stance: What meanings and feelings does each form of talking invoke in informants? How does this affect the way informants express themselves and hear others? Rodriguez

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[19] According to the transcripts, 87 of the 150 informants spontaneously used at least one sign during the interview.

criticized bilinguals who attributed associations to a e rather than to family ties. Like Sontag, Rodriguez s to refute the metaphoric realm. Yet, research has dly demonstrated how many bilinguals (as well as language learners) associate a different emotional eristics and a different sense of identity with each e -- regardless of actual fluency or performance.[20] ng associations can even occur within a single e. Studies such as those by Tannen (1990) illustrate and women bring different expectations to the act of , and these expectations often determine modes of ion as well as reception.

ong the 122 informants who can be considered bilingual dren, signing and speaking were often used differently requently evoked highly contrasting emotional tions.[21] John compared his sense of speaking as goal-d:

> en I talk, it's like, I've got to get to the point. u know, hurry up, get it out. Get on with it.

Ervin-Tripp (1973): "Finally, quite aside from such onal effects, it is possible that a shift in language ciated with a shift in social roles and emotional es. Since each language is learned and usually d with different persons and in a different context, of each language may come to be associated with shift rge array of behavior" (p. 58).

Not discussed here are how different sign languages . Just as different values were evoked by hearing and g, so too different values were attached to different nguage systems.

This compared to the more processual signing:

> I have a hard time explaining joke telling among the deaf. It doesn't have a punch line. It's in the telling, like you want to hear the whole story, no matter how long it takes.

The contrasts between sign language and spoken English also extend to writing. Stuart described his exasperation with talking to his mother on the TTY (which is a written form of English communication):

> ...And then my mother backspaces every time she wants to correct her word and I feel like saying, Okay, I know that's not the word you want to use, it doesn't matter! It reminds me of an old comedy skit on a Slow Talkers Conference. My mother will take forever to type: Dad....is... And I want to say, Okay, Dad is not feeling well. Hurry up and finish the sentence!

Separate usages and settings enhanced the contrasts between the two languages: speaking was used in public, often for a specific purpose or to fit in; signing was used conversationally at home and among friends. Many informants identified speaking as useful for information-gathering, protection, and negotiation. Several informants mentioned how strange their voice sounded to them. Speech was often characterized as "limiting," "distancing," "formal," and "tight." In contrast, informants described themselves as using sign informally, for "just talking". Two signs for 'talking' illustrate this difference: to talk as a hearing person, the right hand moves quickly back and forth from the mouth; to talk as a deaf person, the arms are relaxed downward while both hands move -- often at a slower pace. When they signed, informants frequently described themselves as feeling

more "intimate," "natural," "expressive," and "comfortable." Even informants who did not sign or knew only rudimentary signs attributed many of the same positive associations to signing.

During the interviews many informants spontaneously signed particular words or phrases, and these usages generally conform to these historical and emotional associations. Informants' use of signs fell into four distinct situations: when they felt a sign expressed the concept better; when informants were momentarily unable to think of the English word; when they were paraphrasing their parents; or when they became emotionally unable to speak. Although additional instances of sign occurred sporadically during some interviews, present analysis does not indicate identifiable pattern(s) to their uses. Two informants requested that the entire interview be conducted in sign, both initially explaining that they no longer had any opportunities to sign with anyone. One of these, Antonio told me

> [In sign:] Through signing, I remember a long time ago. I can feel the memories in my hands.

This sense of signing -- not only as an option of expression but one which kinesthetically accessed a realm of nostalgia and memories -- permeated many other informants' associations with signing as well.

The few studies of bilingual hearing children of deaf parents have concentrated on the two languages of spoken English and American Sign Language. Yet, sign language is not

a language of the hands, but involves the entire face y. Body postures and facial expressions can have very nt meanings within each culture. Restricting the focus uage alone also ignores the previously discussed realms d and silence. Although he was not fluent in sign e as a child, Alex's description of talking illustrates ge of options:

> e thing that I notice is that when I communicate with af people, which I don't do very often, I'm using my dy a lot, my whole body, using my face, using a fferent voice and I can feel body reactions, I can feel ...but in the hearing world, it's more mental, more rbal, more confined. [Here, he used his hands to eate a box around his mouth.] Not so much ysical...There's not a lot of affect, no aggression -- tally the opposite of the way I've been trained.

the interviews, several women and men remarked that ew I was listening to them because I used appropriate and body expressions.

formants provided numerous examples of how cation with others was misinterpreted because of the ultural cues. Many informants mentioned prolonged eye -- crucial in Deaf culture -- often made other people comfortable: several had learned not to use it as much. nts also reported they did not feel heard when others give them "good eye":

> rbara [his wife] was always talking to me from the her room. And every time, I would go into the room and y, I can't understand a thing you're saying. And she id, "Well, I'll just talk louder." And I said, No, you n't understand, I need to see you in order to derstand what you're saying.

explained that one college professor gave her a lower

mark during an oral exam because she gestured when she spoke -- which he felt indicated that she was uncertain of what she wanted to say. Gwen remembered the time her husband became angry when she asked "Did you see my key?" because he felt she was accusing him. Later she realized she often asked questions using the standard ASL question format -- arched, furrowed eyebrows -- an expression her husband misinterpreted as accusatory and angry. Informants also described how they often perceived another person's emotional state by reading visual cues, facial expressions and body language. Yet, this sometimes risked resentment and misinterpretation. Informants' propensity to be more physically expressive was also felt to make them more vulnerable. Alex described the advantages and disadvantages of his bilingual upbringing:

> You do have an advantage by being able to read another hearing person's body language.. and they can feel it, almost like I'm raping them. The world doesn't communicate in the way deaf people do, so if you want to be accepted in the world, you try to be and do like they are -- speak like this, don't show too much...if you have deaf parents, you often will give more away about you and that's the hard part because it gives others more information and awareness about you. They can see you when you don't want to be seen so obviously. When you've had deaf parents, it's hard, not all environments are safe and you may not want to be seen everywhere you go.

These differing modes of expression and informants' associations with them affected later adult communication as well -- both expressively and receptively. Many mentioned feeling somewhat disjointed from the expressiveness that sign language would normally bring when trying to communicate in

the hearing world: "I find it very hard to focus all your information in this space [points to the mouth]." Several spoke of their frustrations of expressing themselves in spoken and written English -- in the classroom, in work situations, with spouses, or even during their interview: "I don't think you want to interview me, I have such a terrible time talking like that." Five informants who had been or were in therapy described feeling blocked because they could not express themselves to therapists who knew no sign language. A few younger informants explained how they had taken some exams in sign language and this had improved their grades. Although the particular style of signing varied among informants,[22] their contrasts between the expressive nature of signing and the limiting nature of speaking were often remarkably similar.

Not all informants, however, disavowed the spoken word. Almost one-third of all informants preferred spoken language as adults, even though many of these expressed continued fondness for sign language. A number of these men and women felt that, whether or not they used sign as children, spoken English was their natural language as adults. Brian explained:

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[22] Larry compared his method of signing with that of his sister: "I was raised [pantomimes signing with tightly closed mouth] -- my dad does not use his voice and I sign like my dad, ASL [repeats signing with mouth pressed closed]. No [pantomimes mouth movements]. Nothing! Just closed mouth. That's it! My sister was raised more like my mother. She [mother] would talk and sign at the same time. She does to this day. And, so, we're quite different."

> re I sign. But I'm hearing. I have a hearing wife, aring kids, hearing friends. I live in a hearing rld.

st bilinguals, hearing children of deaf parents appear ow a more transitional pattern of bilingualism in the he gradual adoption of the dominant language. A few such as the Deaf, continue to be permanently al. Some informants questioned whether sign language r sufficient for those who can hear. Alice told me she eard her parents say they loved her, and when I asked she meant in sign or in voice she responded: "Oh, I ey loved me, but I never heard the words. I needed to he words." Sharon described the affects of her od with a sense of humor: "After all that, I want a with giant ears so I know I'll be listened to." to decipher metaphoric or actual meanings with regard unication processes becomes confounded by the enormous of oppression against sign language. These ting and competing interpretations of the two languages flect the biases of hearing and the deaf cultures -- which remains sharply divided on the value of speaking ning.

storical repression of deaf culture and sign language en exacerbated by professional programs (such as eter training programs or deaf education teacher s) which several informants felt altered or rejected amily perspectives. Often, more English-based sign

systems or simultaneous signing and talking were the methods preferred.

> Now, I was 23 and I'm at work at school for the deaf... And I mean, I was like, I don't know the right signs for 'dormitory' or 'infirmary.' And all these other people are trained. They have master's degrees and I was like [pantomimes gaping and puzzled]. Because I didn't know any of that shit. But, the big challenge was, for me, to sign and talk at the same time. I could not do it. So help me God, I could not do it. I didn't know how to do it. I decided that if I was going to do that, that I would have to let my mouth run my hands. So that became the primary goal -- which was uncomfortable for me.

Another informant:

> It took me a while, but I finally got it. I finally saw that what they were really trying to do was make deaf kids into hearing kids.

Yet, several informants credited professional programs and/or the increased public awareness of sign language as giving them a framework in which to understand their bilingual experiences. Stella explained she had learned "how to do it", how to alternate between the two languages and cultures.

> Oh, it took me a while, but I finally figured out how to do it. ["Do what?"] Oh, you know, that English and sign are different. I just learned to use them at different times.

Bilingual studies have demonstrated that linguistic maintenance depends on functional needs; when these psychosocial factors disappear, children and adults usually revert to monolingualism. This pattern was particularly evident among older informants whose parents were deceased or who had no professional or social contact with deaf people. Most informants, however, continued to use sign language --

with their parents, in their professions or in their social contacts with other deaf people. Informants shared additional reasons for their continued use of sign language. For some, signing and gesturing acknowledged their deaf heritage and represented the positive side of being "different."

> It's weird, sometimes I'll be talking talking and all the hearing people are all taken by what I am doing with my hands or my body. ["So, how does that make you feel?"] Oh, I like it. I like the attention. It makes up for all those stares when I was a kid.

Others felt that signing remained a better option of expression; through signing, they revealed more of themselves:

> To me, I think it's [signing] the greatest gift. It's not just a talent, it's a gift that I'm fortunate to have deaf parents because I've learned a language that's so expressive and is so much a show. If any person really wanted to know what I was saying and not hear it but see it, this is the language to go to. That's how you get to know me.

Summary

Cultures differ in what is affectively arousing. Among many deaf people, American Sign Language remains a central and cherished symbol of their cultural identity. Among their hearing children, however, the use and maintenance of ASL varies greatly. In examining the relationship between culture and language, Pi-Sunyer (1980) asks whether one can truly be Catalan without speaking the language: "If the answer is in the affirmative, what does it mean to be Catalan once language takes a secondary position as a symbol of identity?" (p. 114). To paraphrase this question for the informants in this study,

What is the relationship between sign language and culture and how does it affect cultural identity and affiliation?

The lives of these informants suggest three responses to the issue of language and cultural identity. First, the focus on language often ignores non-linguistic forms of communication. Informants' family experiences included not only specific forms of sign language, but the realms of silence, sound, face and body. Each of these features became not only a means of communication, but developed into powerful symbols of cultural experiences as well. Secondly, parity between language and cultural identity presumes homogeneous use and fluency among all members of a cultural group. Not only their hearing children, but culturally Deaf people vary in their fluency and use of sign language. Yet, whatever their personal history of sign language, the overwhelming majority of informants -- even those from oral backgrounds -- expressed strong loyalty and support for sign language. Finally, both deaf parents and their hearing children have experienced attitudes of repression and annihilation toward sign language. This shared history suggests that although sign language is an important symbol of Deaf culture, it is not the only measure of cultural affiliation. Oppression, too, contributes an important dimension to cultural solidarity and affiliation.

Grosjean (1982) describes four types of bilinguals: those who align with one side, or the other, or with both, or with

neither. Each of these characterizations fit at least some of the men and women interviewed. From language use to cultural affiliation, each represents a certain facet of the experience of being a hearing child of deaf parents. Those who identify themselves as more deaf than hearing:

> If any person really wanted to know what I was saying and not hear it but see it, this is the language to go to. That's how you get to know me.

Those who stress that they are hearing:

> Sure I sign. But I'm hearing. I have a hearing wife, hearing kids, hearing friends. I live in a hearing world.

Those who straddle both worlds:

> Oh, it took me a while, but I finally figured out how to do it. ["Do what?"] Oh, you know, that English and sign are different. I just learned to use them at different times.

And those who feel lost between these two worlds:

> It's like me telling you about a song you never heard before. I can try all sorts of ways, but until you hear it, you can never really know what it's like. Not really. [Shakes his head and signs 'can't'].

Although each of these four informants reveals a different aspect of bilingualism, it would be a mistake to presume these categories are exclusive or permanent. Conflicting characterizations appear within the narratives of many individual informants. This fluidity underscores an important heritage among these women and men. Signing, speaking, sound and silence -- whether evaluated positively or negatively -- each contributed to the development of a sense of self, of conscience and of cultural affiliation.

SECTION III: CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPES

CHAPTER 7: A FAMILY INSIDE OUT OR UPSIDE DOWN

> ["Do you feel your family life was any different from other people?"] I don't know. [Shakes head.] It's like we were all inside out or upside down from everybody else. [Laughs.] Or maybe we were the ones right side up and they were all topsy turvy.

Introduction to Chapter 7

For most of us within contemporary Western cultures, the question of identity is invariably linked to our childhood and our families of origin. Yet, the conviction that each of us is the creation of a mother, a father and early family experiences mingles biological and sociological beliefs with particular cultural assumptions. We evaluate ourselves and others against two elusive and culturally dependent yardsticks: the normal family and optimal childhood experiences. Certain roles and interactions are prescribed for both parent and child. Those who deviate from these expectations risk social alienation and psychic dysfunction. The previous chapter considered how informants' family experience of communication -- both practically and symbolically -- fundamentally differed from the dominant views of the hearing world. How did these distinctions affect the day-to-day workings of their families? What changes in childhood roles resulted from having deaf parents? And, how have these modifications informed informants' adult identities?

This chapter examines two related activities which recur throughout most informants descriptions of their childhood: interpreting and being responsible. In most cases, the scope of these activities intermingled and broadened to include decision-making, mediation, advocacy, and generally "taking care of things." The degree and nature of informants' obligations varied from family to family, and were often mitigated by the parents' education and income, and community support and resources. Yet, despite variation in individual circumstances, almost all informants acknowledged these activities were typical -- if not within their own families, among many other hearing children of deaf parents.

The Family has been studied as the primary arena of socialization -- particularly for children but also for their parents. The family is seen as responsible for the development of the self in the social world. McLain and Weigert (1979) describe the family as both "a deeply subjective personal experience and a powerfully objectivated social emergent" (p. 167). This chapter has three overall goals: 1) to examine informants' childhood roles within their families; 2) to explore the relationship between these childhood roles and informants' present adult identity; and 3) to consider how the roles of children and of parents differ between hearing and deaf cultures.

Interpreting

Whether in a department store or during a church service, it is a sight most people take note of: a small child interpreting for their deaf parent. Interpreting is perhaps the one feature most associated with hearing children of deaf parents. Researchers, too, have examined this recurrent family obligation and found that interpreting responsibilities often vary among siblings -- many times falling to the oldest daughter (Wilbur and Fristoe 1986). Yet, the focus on who interprets and with what frequency overlooks a more fundamental conceptual issue. Questions such as 'Did you interpret for your parents?' or 'How often did you interpret?' presume a uniform understanding of the term 'interpreting' -- one which is defined only as translating from one language to another. Informants' narratives, however, reveal a much broader range of activities which are subsumed under the rubric of 'interpreting.' What does 'interpreting' mean?

Methods and styles of interpreting evolve within the context of the family. Chapter 6 examined the myriad methods of communication which existed within informants' families: various forms of sign language, speech, lipreading, pantomime, as well as combinations of these methods. This diversity demonstrates that even on a pragmatic level, the actual languages used in interpreting varied from home to home. Interpreting contexts varied as well. Several informants reported they interpreted only in certain situations: business

rather than social, or emergencies rather than casual interactions. Some described how certain siblings gravitated toward particular interpreting situations. Greta described how she and each of her four brothers and sisters assumed separate interpreting duties (p. 127). Styles of interpreting varied also -- from one which is more simultaneous (translating at the same time someone is speaking or signing) to one which has been humorously labeled "stand-and-pray."[1] Languages, methods, contexts and styles each color the experience of 'interpreting.'

When informants were asked to describe their interpreting activities, a number of inconsistencies emerged. Scott did not consider himself an interpreter -- yet his description contradicted his assertion.

> Mostly my sister. ["So, you never interpreted?"] No, she was the main one. [What happened if she wasn't around?] Oh, I'd do it, but I wasn't as good as she was.

Scott deferred to his sister as the identified family interpreter and he presumed that interpreting demanded a certain level of skill. Other informants also wavered about whether or not they interpreted at home. Like Scott, a few felt that interpreting was reserved for those who were fluent in American Sign Language. Informants did not always

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[1] "Stand-and-pray" interpreting contrasts with the simultaneous method in that the person motionlessly attends to what is being said -- perhaps with head bowed and hands clasped -- and eventually repeats or summarizes what has been said up to that point.

recognize their use of other forms of communicating (such as lipreading or home signs) as 'interpreting.' Roberta echoed Scott's disparity:

> Are you kidding? Oh, I couldn't be an interpreter. I never learned all the things, you know, that you have to go through...I just did it at home, for my Mom and Dad.

More common than the few informants who underestimated their interpreting experiences were the vast majority of informants for whom interpreting represented a much more diverse range of endeavors than merely translating from one language into another. Most informants readily acknowledged the subjective nature of interpreting. The sign for 'vague' is often applied to conversations which are ambiguous and deliberately evasive; this sign was used by several informants to describe how they altered interpreting situations that were embarrassing, confrontational, problematic or awkward (See Chapter 2, pp. 65-67). Whether out of exasperation or clarification, these changes occurred both in sign language and in speech. Telephone interpreting offered the greatest latitude in manipulating conversations by placing the conversation completely within the hands of the hearing child. Without visual cues from either side, both the deaf parent and the hearing person relied on the informant to relay the conversation. Agnes explained that she always made sure to find out everything her parents wanted to say before making any phone calls:

> I didn't want them to think my parents were stupid. One time this [hearing] guy asked me what was taking them so long. He said, "Well, don't they understand what you're saying?"

George remembered how his father wanted him to call up all the garage mechanics in the yellow pages in order to compare prices.

> I tried to tell him that there were just too many, but he insisted. So, I sat there and pretended to be talking to someone when it was just the dial tone.

In addition to modifying the translation, many informants recognized that interpreting often expanded to include other responsibilities such as decision-making, advocacy, intervention, and protection.

> I didn't just interpret. I had to make the decisions. I would be nine or ten. I would interpret like at the bank or something and then it got too hard. I'd tell my father, "I'll explain later." It was easier. You know, it's funny, many times now I can look back and say, I wasn't the interpreter, I was the decision maker. I'd go to the bank and the man would explain. And I would nod or ask questions. And all the while I was telling my father, "I'll explain it to you later."

Another informant:

> These hearing parents with a deaf child came to our house one day. They wanted to find out what my parents thought would be best for their kid, what kind of school they should choose. So, of course, Mom and Dad both said, "Send him to a residential school." And I interpreted the whole thing. But later, I pulled these people aside and said, You know, it would be a lot better if you sent your kid to an oral school.

Informants frequently described their childhood in terms of specific roles: "interpreter", "facilitator", "mediator", "manager". How does this arrangement affect the availability

of roles for the parents as well as their children? Are deaf parents more able to participate in a broader spectrum of social interaction, or do their children preclude greater participation by assuming certain roles for them?

The professionalization of sign language interpreters dramatizes these issues. A sharp division has occurred between those who argue for a more mechanistic model of interpreting (only translating the information) and those who advocate active interventions and clarifications when necessary. A more mechanistic approach is thought to provide deaf people with unfiltered interactions with the hearing world; any attempt at intervention merely sustains the barriers between the deaf and the hearing. Yet, most informants who were professional interpreters cited their family experiences as favoring a less rigid and mechanistic approach to interpreting. Informants -- whether professional interpreters or not -- repeatedly pointed out that many deaf persons often lack the verbal skills and worldly sophistication necessary to participate on a peer level with hearing persons. Years of societal isolation and stigma cannot be countered without occasional advocacy or intervention.

> No, of course you shouldn't go in there and take over the whole thing. That's what they're [professional interpreters] always afraid of. But, you can't always just give the words. Sometimes you've got to explain -- to the hearing people or the deaf people. You can't just assume that if you say the words or do the signs that everybody understands. Deaf people and hearing people aren't operating from the same set of experiences.

Like many foreign language interpreters, informants were aware

of the cultural issues as well as the problems of translation. Kaufert (1984) describes such people as "cultural brokers." Grosjean (1982) points out this issue among children of immigrant parents:

> Like many children of immigrant parents, BS found herself in the situation of liaison between her minority language environment and the majority language community. Her parents and uncle's family turned to her not only for translations but also for explanations concerning the language and the culture. She tried to explain why things were the way they were" (p. 200).

"Explanation concerning the language and the culture" is another indication that language fluency alone is not a sufficient determinate of cultural boundaries.

Although many informants were secure in their sense of interpreting as a form of cultural mediation, two aspects of interpreting remained problematic: inappropriate situations, and the loss of identity. Almost every informant had an interpreting "horror story" -- from their own experiences or from someone they knew. These episodes ranged from accompanying parents to the doctor's office to interpreting parents' divorce proceedings to interpreting a family member's funeral. Informants' examples generally fell into two (not mutually exclusive) types of inappropriate situations: those in which the informant was too young:

> So, there I was. I don't know, I was probably five or six. And the doctor is saying, "Tell your mother she needs a mastectomy. I didn't know how to spell it. [Starts to cry.] And I didn't even know what it meant. And my mother is looking at me like, "What? What did he say?"

and those in which the informant was emotionally involved:

> When I found out that they wanted this teenager to interpret for her parents' divorce, I went through the roof. I marched down [to the lawyer's office] and slammed the door open and started screaming, "Are you crazy? Do you have any idea what you are asking that girl to do?" I thought that kind of stuff stopped long ago. It's still going on!

These two types of interpreting situations stress different aspects of informants' family experiences. Informants were more likely to assess situations as age-inappropriate only in retrospect. Only as adults did most informants learn their experiences contradicted culturally acceptable standards of childhood. In this regard, hearing children were dependent on others to determine which situations were appropriate.

> Sometimes I think my parents should have known that, that they should have looked out for me because I was just a kid -- what did I know...But I'm not sure they really could have, I mean who was really looking out for them in their families when they were growing up?

In contrast, informants were keenly aware of circumstances in which they had personal stakes at the time it was happening. Yet, despite their reluctance to interpret in these emotionally-charged situations, most informants met their family obligations because they conceded that there were usually no other options.

Telling these "horror stories" serves several purposes: to admonish others that these circumstances not be repeated; to illustrate their unique life experiences; and to express feelings which had been suppressed at the time. Although several informants dismissed these problematic situations as "past history," many continued to use these stories

didactically. Indeed, many of these stories appeared when informants were discussing what advice they would give deaf parents. Most informants felt that there was nothing intrinsically wrong with using a child as an interpreter, yet they also conceded that the parent (or other adult) needed to evaluate each situation. Interpreting stories also served to dramatize the unique experience of being a hearing child of deaf parents. Whether interpreting holiday meals or a mother's hysterectomy, these stories are highly specific to hearing children of deaf parents. Informants described how they often resolved interpreting in personally charged situations by suppressing their emotions at the time. Several informants also commented on how their interpreting efforts had not been appreciated at the time. Re-telling these stories was emotionally cathartic as well as personally validating for many informants.

In addition to placing informants in compromising situations, interpreting sometimes engendered a loss of identity. Although being an interpreter often made informants feel important and gave them a sense of control, many also described how interpreting took away the sense of being anyone. Mel explained:

> Sometimes I'd be my father, or my mother, or the preacher, or the bank teller. I'd be all these different voices. But where was my voice?

For Howard, childhood interpreting raised ambivalent feelings.

> Sometimes I think of all the things I got to experience because I was an interpreter. I would never have been exposed to all that...But everything's one step removed. Not your voice, not your ideas -- always someone else's.

Several men and women commented that the more invisible they were as an interpreter, the better they were doing their job. Celine remembered a time when as a professional interpreter on a jury, the judge declared her "a legal non-entity" so there would not be more than the required number of people on the jury. The sense of invisibility forms an important metaphor of identity which will be explored in Chapter 10.

Interpreting entails conceptually organizing what is being said as well as putting oneself in the place of the speaker and the listener. G. Herbert Mead (1934) emphasized the dual importance of play in learning social roles: the acquisition of specific roles themselves, and the acquisition of the skill to shift roles. Like Mead, Adorno (1950) also focused on taking the role of the other which he hypothesized was absent in persons fixated at the earlier projective level. Hastorf and Bender (1952) distinguish ethnocentrics as "projectors" and equalitarians as "emphathizers". Adorno found ethnocentric persons deficient in insight (a consistent self-evaluation with an outside criterion). These findings illuminate informants' consistent self-evaluation which stressed that their family experiences developed and encouraged their ability to empathize with others.

Family Responsibilities

During our interview, Diane brought out a drawing she had done in college. The assignment had been to depict herself and her family. Diane's picture showed a man and woman in the center of the paper surrounded by a circular wall. All around the outside of the wall were television sets, telephones, musical notes, and a multitude of faceless figures. I presumed the central figures were her parents, and that the wall represented her parents' deafness -- but, finding no obvious trace of Diane, I asked Diane where she was. She pointed to the wall.

> That's supposed to be me -- not a solid wall, like a screen. Keeping things in, keeping things out. That was me. That was my responsibility.

Responsibility. Few themes recurred as prominently within the narratives of these informants:

> I learned one thing, that's for sure. I learned to be responsible.
>
> Well, I know I had to be responsible from day one. I'm more responsible than anybody I know.

What were most informants' actually responsible for? One obvious responsibility was the realm of sound: ranging from vigilance about environmental noises to interpreting conversations. As has been shown, interpreting meant not only translating but often included a much broader range of activities such as cultural information and mediation, intervention and decision making. Chapter 2 touched on the

'Legacy of Protection and Advocacy,' which describes responsibilities of impression management, deviance disavowal and advocacy. Many informants gave examples of being responsible by describing how they had to monitor themselves. Playing the stereo or radio was a frequent example. A number of informants never turned on the radio without permission; others turned it on softly; a few admitted they turned it on as loud as they wanted -- but rarely when other hearing people were around. Although the specific limits varied, there was almost always some point that informants did not go beyond. As Regina explained, "It wouldn't have been fair to my parents."

One of my most memorable interviews was with Beth. Beth described how she had gotten pregnant at sixteen and run off with her boyfriend. Within a year after she left home, Beth's parents lost their family home and car due to financial mismanagement, and the stress pushed a difficult marriage toward divorce. Beth returned home with baby in tow, filed legal papers to reclaim her parents' possessions, tempered her parents' marital struggles, and held two jobs in order to reverse her family's fortunes. She had just turned 18. I was genuinely overwhelmed and asked her, "Isn't it too much?" Beth looked somewhat surprised. Without a trace of stoicism or bitterness, she smiled. "You just do it."

The imposing nature of informants' family responsibilities can also be seen in negative examples. A

number of informants criticized themselves or their siblings as irresponsible. Several siblings explained how they avoided the excessive responsibilities their other siblings accepted or had thrust upon them. Others, like Bill, recognized different times in his life when he felt overwhelmed by his family responsibilities:

> As soon as I turned 18, I moved to [another state] just to get away. Because I didn't know what I wanted to do. Especially all that pressure. After I moved out, every time I went home, they were still asking me questions like, "What do you think about this?", or "Can you do or call for this and that?" So I went and lived away for two years. And then I decided that it wasn't so bad.

And, a few removed themselves altogether from their families in order to avoid the burdens of family responsibility:

> I had to move away. I just couldn't take it...Yeah, sure, I feel guilty about it. But it was just too much. I couldn't do it. My sister is still there. If it wasn't for her, maybe I would have to do it. God! Sometimes I just don't even want to think about it.

Between those who took on extraordinary family obligations and those who avoided them altogether were the majority of informants who accepted varying degrees of family obligations. Assessing these childhood responsibilities was an emotionally divisive issue for many individual informants as well as among this population as a whole. During the interviews, the mention of childhood responsibilities often provoked an outburst of resentment or immediate disclaimers:

> I hated it! They never should have made me do all those things! I was only a kid.

Another informant:

> I had to do a few things for my parents, but so what? It was never any kind of burden.

Several informants heatedly accused other adult hearing children of deaf parents of betraying their parents and blaming their parents' deafness for their own shortcomings. Others told me they felt that some adult hearing children were "in complete denial" -- unwilling to acknowledge family difficulties because of their propensity to defend their parents. As informants discussed their childhood responsibilities, two differing but highly interrelated contexts emerged: what it means to be a child, and evaluating how certain childhood experiences affected adult life. Both of these situations incorporate a significant struggle for informants: trying to determine the elusive line between cultural relativity and intrinsic psychic damage.

Carl was explaining why his family responsibilities were of a different magnitude than other children. He said there was a difference between a child who had to mow the lawn and a child who was involved in the financing of a house:

> If the lawn doesn't get mowed, well, you just get tall grass. If I make a mistake, we lose the house.

Carl conceded that, although burdensome, many of these childhood responsibilities were unavoidable:

> You have to wait until the child is old enough to push the mower, but many times the communication needs force the situation. It forces the young child into premature duties and responsibilities.

Informants' family obligations contradict prevailing cultural

beliefs about the expected roles of children and parents. Their childhood responsibilities appear unmistakably inverted from those within a "normal" family. In the vernacular of current self-help literature, these children appear to have become the parents. Like Carl, more than half of all informants used popular psychological terms to describe their family obligations: "premature duties," "parentified child," "overly-responsible," "a little adult," "a lost childhood."

While all informants acknowledged that there were some responsibilities that should not be given to a child, a number of women and men argued that their own childhood roles were primarily adaptive within a different family. Art saw the factor of deafness as "creating certain types of situations that wouldn't be there otherwise," rather than the idea that "deafness caused this or caused that." He saw deafness as changing the family dynamics. John said:

> Sure, I had to do things that other kids didn't have to do. It was part of my role. But, you do what you have to do in the situation. I don't have any hard feelings about it.

John and Art endorse a version their childhood responsibilities as culturally dictated. A number of informants explained that whatever sense they had as children of being burdened was not that different than any other child or adolescent. Hannah described the difference this way:

> Oh sure, you look at what I did and you think, She had to do all that? God, How awful! And, yeah, I guess I felt like that sometimes, but what kid doesn't? But, I think the real difference is that the kind of things I had to do weren't normal. Weren't considered normal. No kid goes around talking for their parents. If kids weren't supposed to take out the garbage, then any kid who took out the garbage would be abnormal. They'd have a special support group for kids who took out the garbage.

Informants' families were doubly star-crossed: struggling to live ordinary lives within a dominant culture which not only holds hearing and speaking to be normal but extends its dictates to the shape and functioning of the normal family. The myth of the normal family is fashioned from beliefs about what children are for, and the role of parents to create and socialize their children in according to culturally acceptable norms. The child is to be protected, to be taken care of, to be nurtured. This is not to suggest that children do not need these, but that the experience and understanding of them varies culturally. Practitioners and researchers alike have adhered to a model of the family which is linear, unidirectional and absolute.[2] The contemporary Western sense of childhood contrasts with cross-cultural studies which reveal widely differing attitudes and beliefs on childhood. One fundamental difference with regard to socialization

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[2] Brim (1968) states: "The final outcome of the ever-growing influence of the child on the parent is the gradual inversion of the relationship between the two, as it shifts from the initial position in which the parent has complete responsibility and authority to the reverse, at a later period, when the child has come to assume these same responsibilities of the parental role toward his aging and less able parents (p. 214).

theories is that childhood is not universally regarded as the most significant period of an individual's formation (Takanishi 1978; Korbin 1981; Wagner 1983). A second major difference is the contemporary Western emphasis on individual achievement -- a norm which stands in stark contrast to many family systems.

Culturally defined roles of children complemented culturally defined roles of parents. Informants often pointed out their parents' struggle with roles which were defined within a hearing context. One woman pointed out how difficult it must have been for any deaf parent to ask their child for assistance in light of their own parental experiences:

> So, after a whole lifetime of not having their own parents be there for them, sending them off, not able to talk with them. Imagine what it must feel like. Instead of turning everything around and doing everything you can to make up for what your own parents didn't do for you, you end up having to get your own children do things for you. Look at it from their point of view. They must feel really uncomfortable or ashamed to have to ask their child to do some of those things.

Others reiterated that their parents were well aware of their socially disparaged status, and often put the presumption of adult-identified roles into perspective. Ellen explained:

> One time when I was a teenager I started telling my parents something. They turned to me and said, [signs "Do you think just because we're deaf that you're going to take control and run our lives? No way! Yes, you can hear, yes you help interpret, but remember: You're our child, we're your parents!"]

Although functional within a culturally different family, these family roles also reflect the hegemony of the dominant

culture. Deaf people are devalued and given a particular status: if you cannot speak or hear, you must be helped by those who can. Hearing children inevitably assume roles denied to their parents. Outsiders to the family frequently reinforced the hearing child's sense of responsibility and implicitly superior status:

> When I was little, everyone used to pat me on the head and say, Now be sure you take care of your parents. You're all they've got.

Ilene resented her hearing uncle constantly checking up on her family to make sure her parents were properly raising their children. Greg gave an example of how blatant the presumption that to be a parent, one must be hearing:

> I got a traffic ticket and had to go to court. One of my parents had to go with me. So my mother was going to go this first time. We got to court, and when I got into court, my name came up on the docket, the judge starts talking, I start [signs 'interpreting']. The judge says, "What are you doing?" "I'm interpreting for my mother." "Why?" "She's deaf." "Oh." He thinks for a minute, says, "No." At first I thought he was going to say No, I couldn't interpret. But he says, "No, we can't accept your mother as a legal guardian. She's deaf."

LeVine (1989) suggests that research assumptions about socialization and child development parallel earlier evolutionist thinking. He criticizes not only those models which are based on dominant cultural groups, but models which implicitly represent "an ideal, an optimum development as a species: parental involvement, nutrition, health care, cognitive stimulation, domestic facilities, and an overall sense of emotional and social stability" (LeVine 1989: 51). Such

perspectives on socialization may interpret deviations from these patterns as necessarily negative and inadequate deprivations -- promoting a much more insidious form of ethnocentricity.

Informants' adult evaluations of their childhood responsibilities -- whether positive or negative -- often contrasted with their childhood sense of ordinariness about their families. A number of informants described a shift from perceptions of their childhoods as normal to unavoidable recognition that, in fact, their experiences were not "normal." Thelma explained this change:

> It took me a long time to realize my parents were abnormal, I mean we hearing people were normal. Deaf people were abnormal. Took me a long time to realize that. ["How did that happen?"] I guess when I started going to school. Because the people that -- we lived across the street from this woman whose daughter was my mother's best friend. She was deaf also. Everybody in their family could sign, okay. And their [signs 'mother' and 'father'] their friends signed. So it was just normal. But once I got into school and started meeting girlfriends, going over to their house, I'm like, everybody talks here! I didn't need to sign to them. So, it was like, out of the norm.

Although incidents of cultural conflict occurred throughout their childhood, they were particularly salient as informants grew toward adulthood. As they grew older, informants embraced a growing contradiction: they were hearing people within a Deaf culture. Which values should they embrace? To whom do they owe their allegiance?

Looking Back

Learning to be responsible and having broader life experiences were two of the most frequent responses given when informants were asked how their childhoods affected them as adults. Many informants saw these outcomes as demonstrating that deaf parents can raise children as well if not better than most parents.

> ["So, how does all this affect you now?"] Getting exposed to so much more of life than most kids. I learned things. Banking, life insurance, hospitals, all sorts of stuff.

Others argued that, even if traditional childhood roles were compromised, these responsibilities better prepared them for adulthood:

> Sure it was different! But I didn't have a choice. Nobody asked me if I wanted deaf parents. Nobody asked them if they wanted to be deaf, either. That's just what our lives were like. We just did what we had to do...So maybe I did miss out on some things as a kid. But I got a head start on being an adult.

Several, however, felt they had been crushed by their family responsibilities and by a family system which dissipated their childhoods.

> When you are a child -- six or seven years old -- you can't talk to them like an adult, tell them that what they are asking for is too much or is frustrating. You don't have the sensibility or maybe the vocabulary to express it. It's always: You have to do it...When things would go wrong sometimes, I had a little fantasy. I wanted to crawl into my mother's lap and have her take care of me. But, that never happened. Never.

Informants' differing assessments over the eventual outcomes of their childhood responsibilities became more

contentious as they considered the long-term effects of their family system as a whole. A number of informants' narratives encompassed a prevailing family ethos of interdependence, uncertain boundaries and unmet needs. Such family dynamics appear to conform to patterns and characteristics described within countless popular treatises on dysfunctional families. The majority of informants were well aware of the potential for branding their families and their childhoods as 'dysfunctional.' Informants' responses to the question of family function or dysfunction often exploded in a highly combative struggle -- a fiercely moral determination of one's upbringing. Douglas (1970) emphasizes that in contemporary Western society, moral categories are polarized and interdependent: good is defined by <u>not</u> evil, moral by immoral. Some of the roots of this dichotomization will be explored in Chapter 9.

Have some informants fallen prey to a dominant culture which interprets any difference from child-centered nuclear families as deviant? Or, are others are so imbedded and invested in their family context they are unable to perceive its inherent dangers? Although either of these perspectives are possible for individual informants, these are ultimately unanswerable questions. It is impossible to strip the actual childhood experiences of these informants from sociocultural interpretations -- whether from the Hearing culture or the Deaf culture. What is possible, however, is to reiterate how

these interpretations often reflect cultural not empirical stances. Without an understanding of the comparative values and meanings of Hearing and Deaf cultures, it is impossible to recognize how these values conflict and how they affect the personal life of each informant.

From informants' narratives about their families and the adult outcomes of their childhood experiences, three features will be examined: dependency, boundaries and reciprocity. Each of these family characteristics often suggest positive or negative outcomes: independence or co-dependence; individualism or enmeshment; validation or lack of recognition. It is difficult to raise these issues without adopting a similarly value-laden framework. Although any of these features have considerable psychological implications for the individual, it is my intention to explore them here not along a pathological-healthy continuum but along a continuum of different cultural perspectives. Two additional outcomes of childhood experiences are developed within a broader framework of the family and outsiders: feeling different and feeling in between two worlds. These two subjects form Chapters 8 and 9.

Independence, Dependence and Interdependence

Few ideas are as central or as emblematic of American life as independence. From studies of earliest childhood to essays on our national character, we consider how independence

is engendered in infants and whether we still have it as adults. As we age and weather the calamities of life, a critical measure of our self-worth is whether or not we remain "independent." It is no surprise, then, that terms like 'dependency' and 'co-dependency' run contrary to normative American values. Issues of independence and dependence are encountered throughout many of these narratives. Ella nodded as she told me that dependency issues were a trademark of children of parents with disabilities:

> It's a dependency thing. Absolutely! The reality is that one feels more attached or needed. It's one of the things that being the child of handicapped parents is. I remember seeing this two year old child who was telling her [deaf] mother that something was going on. She was so tuned in. She was so alert. Most two year olds aren't that alert. I've taught early childhood and I never saw that. What a great thing! I mean, we are all of us more aware, more seeing, more conscious in ways that lots of children are not. I looked down and I thought, God, there I am. I'm only two, I can't possibly know everything that's going on, but they depend on me, and I do what I can.

Many informants told me they had dealt with being co-dependent or were currently "working on my co-dependency." For several informants, co-dependency was limited to their relationship with their parents. Others extended it to their spouses and friends as well. Although the majority of these men and women stressed how independent their parents were, nearly one-third of all informants concluded that their upbringing resulted in their being 'co-dependent.' How can these contradictory family dimensions be explained?

Informants evaluate their own independence and that of

their deaf parents against differing cultural standards -- those of the Hearing and those of the Deaf. Although independence is valued among the Deaf, it is takes on a different shape in the context of the Hearing world. Independence becomes equated with a lack of external assistance and "core American values [of] competitiveness, individualism, and social mobility" (Becker 1980: 37). Deaf peddlers are generally scorned within the Deaf community precisely because they perpetuate the sense of deaf people as "helpless and broken" -- not so much among deaf people but more importantly among hearing people.[3] Informants frequently asserted their mothers' and fathers' independence -- even though their parents may have used interpreters or compensated in other ways. Informants often saw their parents' dependency as encouraged by the hearing world; many informants distinguished between those situations in which assistance was genuinely needed and those situations which, as Robert put it, his parents "did just out of habit." Determining 'independence' often corresponded to a culturally determined heirarchy of behaviors. Certain behaviors are judged to be more independent than others: to use a crutch is more independent than to use a person to lean on; to use a white cane more independent than to ask a person to help you across the street. These examples also indicate that

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[3] See Padden and Humphries (1988) p. 46 for additional discussion on deaf peddlers.

independence is frequently synonymous with non-human assistance.

Deaf people reflect the particularly paradoxical relationship with independence among the American disabled community. The individual and collective histories of many persons with disabilities span being viewed as helpless dependents to repeatedly affirming their independence (Zola 1982). Many of these people have had to reassess the autonomous American version of independence and question its applicability to their lives. How much help is too much help? Does it matter whether the assistive device is a pair of eyeglasses or a motorized wheelchair? If I employ an attendant, am I dependent on my attendant or is he dependent on me? The disabled civil rights movement has reframed the parameters of independence from excluding all signs of external support to a sense of control over one's destiny.

In addition to qualifying the measures of independence, informants' narratives take the issue of independence a step further -- by proposing that interdependence is at least as valuable as independence. Tom explained that being dependent on someone was not necessarily bad, but it was a matter of extremes:

> Oh, you know, there are people who don't want to depend on anyone to save their life. And then there are people who depend on somebody whether they need to or not.

A dominant cultural emphasis on individual autonomy and achievement may lead to feelings of loneliness and alienation,

a dynamic often countered by group identification with other adult with similar backgrounds. Within the peer based Deaf community which relies on its own members for information as well as normative standards, interdependence is a vital and socially important behavior. Their emphasis on the group rather than on the individual underscores a critical difference in how independence and dependence are perceived. Interdependence is seen not as a negation of independence but a means of achieving it. The contrast in standards can be seen in Ray's description of his parents:

> My wife always gets on me about my parents. You know, she says I should just let them take care of things themselves. She says, "You're just keeping them dependent on you." But, they only ask me when they need my help. They're both proud. They're both real independent.

Although the discussion thus far proposes differing cultural perspectives on independence and interdependence, there remains the issue of co-dependency. As used by informants, co-dependency referred to a pattern of behavior which stressed two aspects: being depended upon by others and the lack of volition. Rhonda was quick to assume the label:

> Definitely! I am definitely co-dependent. With my husband, my kids. It's my whole way of life. I learned it since I was a kid. It's how I am. I don't know if I can ever change it.

Although some forms of co-dependency have profoundly crippling implications, I focus here on its symbolic and existential dimensions: what do informants mean when they use this term to

describe their lives? Why were nearly one-third of all informants willing to consider this particular negative outcome despite their generally loyal and protective attitudes towards their parents? And, does this concept -- popularized within Hhearing culture -- apply equally within Deaf culture?

Although most informants were reluctant to criticize their parents "because, after all, they didn't choose to be deaf," co-dependency provided a socially recognizable way of talking about their families which had often been outside most hearing people's experiences.

> And Bob [a friend] and I were both talking about our families and being co-dependent. And he said he felt like he finally understood what it was like for me.

Other informants told me how frequently outsiders labeled their family system as co-dependent.

> One time I was telling this friend about having to interpret for my parents, she said, "Oh, you're co-dependent!"

The risks of stigmatizing their parents was countered by a sense of inclusion. A number of informants recounted how parallel their own family situation was to others from co-dependent families. Maria gave this description of a support group for co-dependents:

> And after I finished explaining about myself and my family and stuff, everybody understood...They all said it was just like their family. That it didn't matter that my folks were deaf. We were all co-dependent.

Many informants who acknowledged issues of co-dependency felt like it was only human nature, often qualifying the extent of their co-dependency:

> Oh, I know, nobody's supposed to depend on anybody because we're All American. Well, that's bullshit.

Robert jokingly said that he thought all parent-child relationships were co-dependent and by this measure "everyone is in a co-dependent relationship because everybody has parents."

Talking about co-dependency also gave informants an opportunity to advocate ways of changing these family systems. Although many informants dismissed co-dependent traits within their own families, most men and women felt it was a term which fit some deaf parent-hearing child families. Many informants underscored that deaf people were encouraged to be dependent -- by their families of origin, by the schools, by society. Gary said:

> Yeah, it was a perfect fit. They were taught to be dependent, and I was the one they depended on.

The lack of volition was also a salient feature of co-dependency because it suggested both the need for options as well as the inevitable recognition that often there were no better options.

For several informants, being co-dependent was the unwaveringly negative outcome of their childhood experiences. It is not mitigated by cultural relativism or opportunities for social discourse or advocacy. These informants used co-dependency to describe a childhood of deprivation and a lifetime of caregiving.

> Yes, I mean, nobody has taken care of me all my life. I mean, now my husband has a physical disability and obviously he has to be taken care of.

Tanya's sense of exasperation at having to take care of others is comingled with her longing for others to take care of her. Other informants were less concerned about co-dependency in their childhood than about its continued presence in their adult life. They felt their co-dependent adult relationships were a direct outcome of their relationship with their parents.

The question of co-dependency is not only a matter of differing cultural definitions and attitudes towards dependency. Co-dependency is also based on a particular construction of socialization. This version of socialization is seen as enculturation, as a holistic absorption process. Co-dependency is also affected by differing cultural emphases on the individual and the community. Responding to a cultural perspective of the child as "a free-standing isolable being who moves through development as a self-contained and complete individual" Kessen (1979) observes that in preferring the model of individualism, "we have never taken fully seriously the notion that development is, in large measure, a social construction, the child a modulated and modulating component in a shifting network of influences" (p. 819). Cultural attitudes which envision socialization as a direct result of individual (usually parental) responsibility may also contribute to a need to assign blame in those cases which are

felt to be unsuccessful. Kessen writes:

> The tendency to assign personal responsibility for the successes and failures of development is an amalgam of the positivistic search for causes, of the older Western tradition of personal moral responsibility, and of the conviction that personal mastery and consequent personal responsibility are first among the goals of child rearing (Kessen 1979: p. 819).

Boundaries

The second aspect of informants' family system concerns boundaries. Establishing boundaries is considered a crucial part of the developmental process of separation and individuation all children must go through in order to form their own distinct identity (Bowlby 1969; Mahler 1975; Stern 1985). A lack of boundaries implies a lack of identity. The narratives of many informants are replete with situations in which family relationships appear fluid and often without boundaries. Several informants described feelings of invasiveness, others a lack of privacy. A few openly admitted: "I have no boundaries." Although both of her parents were dead, Helen viewed her intense connection to deafness as wonderful and inescapable:

> Deafness is our lifeline. You know, when you're born, they cut the umbilical cord and you're a separate person. Well, with deafness you can never cut the umbilical cord. Those of us who were raised in it, we can never leave it behind.

Some boundary issues relate to the mismatch between deaf and hearing cultural roles. When informants assumed family

responsibilities which contradicted culturally accepted roles for children, boundary lines indeed became confused. This sense of diffusion was compounded by many informants' interpreting responsibilities which broadened from merely translating to include much more diverse forms of cultural mediation.

> The problems I think that lots of us have is that we play so many different roles. That when we finally get to adulthood we don't know which one we're supposed to take on, which one is supposed to be real.

Although some informants recognized this paradigm shift only in retrospect, in many cases, the disjunction between deaf and hearing cultural norms was understood precisely because informants were cultural mediators and aware of the "hearing rules." Very often, however, the norms were decided in favor of the dominant culture:

> Yeah, all the time, I used to think, well, we do it this way in my family, but everybody else does it different. So, we must be doing it wrong. We've got to do it their way.

Equating fixed boundaries as a goal of identity also reflects a cultural bias of individualism and autonomy and runs contrary to many Deaf ideals of interdependence and community. Although individual distinction is important within the Deaf community, it is as a member of the community not apart from it.

Many of the apparent boundary transgresssions can also be understood as intrinsic features of Deaf culture. Particular behaviors reflect the importance of visual information and

contact as well as the frequent lack of other options. These narratives are replete with examples which suggest different rules of privacy and intimacy:

> Everytime I had to go to the bathroom, I had to let everyone know. Otherwise my Mom or Dad'd be yelling for me and what was I supposed to do? Jump off the toilet and run down the stairs?

Another informant:

> One time this friend in high school came over and she asked me why I didn't close my [bedroom] door. I told her it didn't do any good to close the door because my parents would have to open it anyway in order to ask me if they could come in. And she said, "Well, why don't they just knock, and then you can answer the door?" And, I said, "Yeah, and if I don't answer does that mean I don't want them to come in or that I'm dead?"

A different sense of boundaries is also created by a visually-oriented communication system -- whether sign language or lipreading -- in which speakers are spatially closer. Gerald told me that one friend found his family interactions "too intense, like you're on top of each other all the time." The contrast can also be seen in many informants' sense of auditory communication as distancing.

> I told my husband, I can't hear you when you're not in front of me. I have to see you.

Finally, most members of local Deaf communities are known to each other. There is often little sense of anonymity and separateness. One woman mentioned how much the experience of deafness was informed by a home community in which everyone knew her parents. When she moved to another city, "none of those deaf people knew my parents, no one knew me."

Reciprocity

The third dimension of informants' childhood responsibilities concerns reciprocity. Here, informants weighed their family responsibilities with some sense of recognition or appreciation for their efforts.

> It's kind of what we felt as kids, it's part of our job to take care of things, to do things. And I think people kind of take it for granted and that appreciation is never given. It was just part of our job. If you can hear, it's your responsibility. I mean, after all, your parents are <u>deaf</u>!

Other informants remembered their parents continual efforts to demonstrate their appreciation. Laura compared her father with her mother:

> My Dad! He is always so polite when he asks me to make a phone call. I don't mind doing it at all, but every time [signs: If you're not busy, would you please make a phone call?] But my mother, she just barges in and starts handing me stuff and telling me what she needs. I think maybe she's thanked me once.

Situations of responsibility themselves provided a paradoxical status of importance and burden. Louise resented her responsibilities, yet she also remembered that they also provided her with a certain distinction:

> Yeah, I always felt like, just a babysitter, go clean the house, take care of the kids...I'd go and interpret once in a while and make a lot of damned phone calls. I just hated it. Never even had a phone until we were fourteen. Knocking on the neighbors' doors, using the school's phone...I don't know, I think at the time I really didn't mind it. That attention was kind of nice. Oh, I get to go to the neighbors and use the phone. I liked that attention, sort of, but then it's like, God, after getting to be a teenager, this is getting old! I really hate this!

For other informants, the loss of identity from interpreting

was countered by a gain of control from responsibilities.

Informants talked not only about appreciation for specific childhood and adult duties; a number of informants expressed anger or sadness that their overall situation was not acknowledged -- by hearing people and sometimes by their own parents. As Ellen explained, it was particularly difficult when her own father was unaware of her situation:

> Dad and I watched 'Love is Never Silent'[4]...There were so many things in that movie that were so true. I cried several times in that movie. But later on all my Dad could say was, "It really wasn't like that when you were growing up. We gave you a good home, bought you things, not like what that girl had. And, we didn't live in the city." He was only looking at all the physical and material things in the movie. He didn't get it.

Al felt that his parents' unfamiliarity with the hearing world made it impossible for them to fully appreciate all that was involved when he did something. Other informants pointed out that their parents assumed that "because you can hear, it's just easier" and several informants referred to a standard phrase among many deaf people: "Hearing people know everything." (See more on this phrase in Chapter 9, pp. 265-266.) Donna remembered confronting her family about their apparent lack of awareness:

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[4] 'Love is Never Silent' is the 1985 television movie based on Joanne Greenberg's 1970 novel In This Sign. The story concerns the hardships of a working-class deaf couple and their hearing daughter.

> I was back home with my family [deaf parents and deaf siblings]. And I finally said, [signs and talks: You know, not easy me one hearing! Not easy life!] And they all just looked at me and they said, "We know." That just blew me away that I couldn't say anything more. Why didn't I say, You know! What! You know it's been hard on me all my life! And here I was thinking, You don't know this, and you know! And I didn't know for such a long time. I didn't know. Why didn't they tell me?

The reaction of Donna's family was repeated in a number of other informants' narratives, suggesting that apparent hardships and life struggles may be viewed more routinely within Deaf culture. These differing perspectives are reminiscent of how many deaf parents and hearing grandparents differed in their views on the origins of deafness: as incidental or as a calamity (see Chapter 3). The sense of struggle and resiliency could also be shared by both deaf parents and their hearing children. Tom remembered one time when he was angry with his mother for asking him to interpret and she responded:

> [Signs: I know, hard on you. Hard on me too. Hard on both of us. Not like hearing people. They have an easier life.]

Sharing their parents' perspectives, history and language was often given as a positive outcome of their family experiences. More than half of all informants mentioned that they felt like their parents gave them "the gift of Deaf culture" in exchange for their childhood efforts.

Summary

This chapter has explored some of the family roles and responsibilities of these informants as children, the kinds of bonds within informants' families that were often recreated as adults. This has been a fluctuating mosaic of perspectives -- from children who are now adults, from deaf who are now hearing. Their conflict and disjunction reveal some of the differing sociocultural beliefs about children and about adult identities. A Hearing culture whose nuclear child-centered families rely on defined roles, a hierarchical structure and at times an obsession with individualism. A Deaf culture in which the family reflects a community which is peer-based, interdependent and whose goals are to provide support and communication to other Deaf people while countering the oppression of those who speak and hear. Two cultures whose communication methods appear to distance or to enmesh.

Ogbu (1981) describes the Western model of optimal human development as having three fundamental assumptions: (1) the origins of human competence lie in early childhood and intrafamilial relationships; (2) the nature of human competencies can be studied through a micro-analysis of the child's early experiences; and (3) a child's successful socialization will lead to success in school and as an adult. Pointing out the failure of increasingly earlier intervention programs, Ogbu rejects this white middle-class model as insensitive to cross-cultural diversity and as one which

presumes only particular competencies are in fact worthwhile: "In general it can be said that researchers have not yet reached the point of clearly delineating the unique competencies of minority groups and how such competencies are acquired" (Ogbu 1981: 417).

The sense of differing compentencies or standards does not negate the pain and struggle that a number of informants have shared with me. I do not dismiss their accounts or interpretations of pathology -- whether these originated within the Hearing culture, the Deaf culture, or the conflict between them. My intention within this chapter has been to suggest cultural interpretations for some of these central life experiences -- not only from my perspective but more importantly as it is reflected in the narratives of this broad range of informants. Often separated from others adults like themselves, informants struggled to make sense out of family experiences which frequently bore the brunt of economic oppression and social stigmatization. Informants repeatedly told me they weren't sure "what was the deafness and what wasn't."

Most of these informants searched for suitable explanations of their family experiences (see Chapter 10). Both 'culture' and 'dysfunction' have escaped the confines of the professionals and become part of the vernacular. Freed from the domains of anthropologists and psychologists, these terms have also taken on symbolic meaning. As a group,

informants alternately used 'culture' and 'dysfunction' to express their childhood experiences -- whether to vindicate or to vilify, but most importantly to explain. Their explanations not only shifted according to differing cultural paradigms, but also according to the particular family experiences of each informant. Each informants' words provide not only views of two different worlds, but a glimpse into the heart and soul of that individual. The danger of cultural generalizations is that they ignore the exceptional experience of the individual who is both a part of and apart from that broad schema called culture. The locus of each informant's perspectives can lie anywhere between these two dynamic cultural paradigms, creating an extraordinary but frustrating vision. I can still picture Alan as he described his struggles to make himself heard among the hearing and deaf:

> Wrong word! You're using the wrong word! [signs: Wrong, that's not the right sign.] That's all I heard from people. Well, maybe I was using the wrong word, but when will they ever hear what I want to say?

SECTION II: CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPES

CHAPTER 8: DUMMIES' KIDS: THE HERITAGE OF DIFFERENCE

> You know, none of us are nothing but the same underneath. I know it. I know it 'cause of my folks. It just takes some people longer to figure it out.

Introduction

Sameness and difference are continuously negotiated. Cultural groups positively or negatively evaluate certain characteristics -- whether skin color or religious beliefs or ethnic origins. Rosaldo (1988) observes:

> Culture...is defined by difference. Difference both makes culture visible to observers and makes it relatively easy to separate nature from nurture. Cultural similarities could be biologically based, but differences require cultural explanation (p. 78).

Within American culture there is an emphasis on conformity, but also a need for distinction. This pull between homogeneity and individualism creates a major cultural tension. What place and function does difference have in this society? Can difference be be disencumbered from feelings of stigma and inferiority? Or, does difference ultimately provide a necessary psychological, social and cultural dynamic?

Almost all of the men and women interviewed spontaneously brought up the subject of feeling different -- many as children, others as teenagers. A number of these men and women felt different even now as adults. Who were they different from? "Other kids." "My parents." "My family."

"Hearing people." "Deaf people." "Everyone." Only a handful of informants said they never felt different -- or at least "no different than all kids feel at some time or another." Typical of most informants, Arlene's sense of being different was often negative and ostracizing:

> Oh yeah, I felt different. I felt like, it's awful to say this but, Why me Lord? I felt at times like I was some kind of creep or something because I had deaf parents. There's nothing wrong with having deaf parents, but it's just that they were different from everybody else's parents. My mother couldn't be a homeroom mother. She couldn't talk with the other mothers or call them up and say, Oh, what are we going to do about this or that. She couldn't do that. Little things like that. Then, when there were these parent-teacher conferences, even in the first or second grade I had to go into the conference room with my parents. The other kids all had to stay out of the room when their parents talked with the teacher, but I had to go in there and interpret my own progress and stuff. I felt real uncomfortable about that.

Arlene's narrative touches on three recurrent aspects of difference within informants' narratives: (1) deafness itself; (2) roles within the family; and (3) the feelings and consequences of being different. As emphasized in Chapter 6, the major distinction of deafness is its effect on communication. Informants' families represent a continuum of parental hearing losses, communication systems, as well as a few which have one deaf and one hearing parent. In addition to whatever differences deafness contributed to each parent's personal, educational and social development, deafness also raises issues of difference between parent and hearing child. Chapter 7 focused on a second source of difference: roles

within the family. The typical deaf parent-hearing child family challenges traditional assumptions about family members' roles and how 'normal' families function. Although communication and family differences have been discussed separately, this does not presume that each dimension operates independently.

What are the consequences of being different in American culture? Whatever its physical, moral or tribal origins, how does a sense of difference affect an individual's development and sense of self? Using these women and men's narratives, this chapter is a collection of perspectives on difference: how it is constructed, experienced and responded to. As adults, how do these informants -- those whose lives are so familiar with a difference which centers around deafness -- respond to other types of difference? As this chapter will show, difference is no monolithic badge but an amalgam of experiences and feelings which can vary not only in its origins and reference groups but also in its moral outcome and evaluation.

Shame and Stigma

Much of this chapter concerns the negative aspects of being different. This bias is perhaps common sense to most people. Feelings of embarrassment, shame and stigma would

appear to be routine among hearing children of deaf parents.[1] Indeed, informants remembered many experiences of difference as negative and volunteered incidents ranging from the sounds their parents made, the use of signs, and just having parents who were overtly different from other parents. The present examination is prefaced by recognizing that positive responses and outcomes of being different were also expressed by these men and women. Informants and their parents often found ways not only to counter culturally stigmatized differences but to develop pride in themselves and their Deaf culture. Although these adaptive and transcendent responses will be discussed, they were often overshadowed by the predominantly negative experience of difference -- not as intrinsic personal failures but as evidence of broader social and cultural constructs.

In his seminal work on stigma, Goffman (1963) defines stigma not by a particular external or internal mark but by the negative attribution made within a social context.[2] He emphasized that although the potential for stigma is

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[1] Page (1984) distinguishes between embarrassment, shame and stigma. Embarrassment is seen as particularistic -- a specific moment in a specific situation. Shame is the individual's acknowledgement of failing to meet socially acceptable standards in one or more social roles. "Those experiencing stigma may feel that their whole identity is tarnished because of a particular attribute. Such feelings may be intense; experienced in many situations; and persist for long periods of time" (Page 1984: 18).

[2] In Stigma, Goffman focused on three major types of stigma: "abominations of the body" (such as the physically disabled); "blemishes of individual character" (such as alcoholics or the unemployed); and "tribal" (those of specific ethnic or racial groups).

universal, the perceptions and specifics of stigma are very much culturally determined. Goffman's theoretical framework has given rise to numerous studies which have examined specific types of stigmatized conditions including the construction, management and responses to stigma as well as interactions with those who are not similarly stigmatized. Goffman attempted to underscore the relative and quixotic nature of stigma by asserting that all of us have the capacity to play the role of the normal or the stigmatized; it is only social situations which determine which role is more easily played out: "One can therefore suspect that the role of the normal and the role of the stigmatized are parts of the same complex, cut from the same standard cloth" (1963: 130). Yet, Goffman's presumption that "the stigmatized and the normal have the same mental make-up" glosses those with life-long conditions. A congenital disability or condition -- however responded to -- is often an integral and shaping variable within that person's life. This distinction is even more notable among the Deaf. Such differences are readily observable when comparing someone who is a life-long deaf person with someone who becomes adventitiously deaf as an adult. Those in this latter group share the language and the culture of the Hearing majority, and rarely become members of the Deaf community.

These informants present a unique paradigm with regard to stigma: their parents are apparently stigmatized but they

themselves are apparently 'normal.' Unlike children of ethnic or racial minorities, hearing children do not overtly share their parents' condition. Barbarin (1986) proposes a model for examining the family experience of those with a stigmatized family member:

> The challenge in understanding family dynamics in relation to stigma arises from the need to account for the numerous individual, group, and system factors that make for diversity in family functioning...Families are embedded within a particular social and historical context, are shaped in response to a particular set of cultural norms and demands, and are heavily influenced by the unique personalities of their members (p. 164).

Although he did not mention this population, Goffman proposed two dimensions of stigma which are useful in discussing these informants' perspectives: socialization in an alien environment, and courtesy stigma.

An Alien Environment

Goffman (1963) proposed four different learning patterns of those who are stigmatized -- depending upon the sequence and the interplay of learning the standards of being normal and the consequences of being stigmatized. These informants illustrate Goffman's least discussed socialization path: "those who are initially socialized in an alien community...and who then must learn a second way of being that is felt by those around them to be the real and valid one" (p. 35). As young children, most men and women reported little sense of their parents' deafness as remarkable or that they were somehow different from their parents. This follows

expected developmental patterns in which young children remain strongly identified with their parents. Additionally, most informants' parents socialized exclusively with other deaf people, creating a home environment which provided little initial opportunities for comparisons between being hearing or deaf. Within many informants' families, deafness was not only familiar, it was the norm.

Stigma is an interactive, dialectical process. It depends not only on particular cultural values but upon interaction and evaluation. It is within the public arena that certain marks and behaviors were identified as different and evaluated as negative. Informants often cited the first day of school as a time of realization. Bob remembered this scene:

> My first day of school my mother came with me. I don't remember really thinking about my parents being different before then. When I got to the schoolyard I just remember seeing all these mothers who were making these strange movements with their mouths [mimics exaggerated mouth movements.] And when my mother signed to me, everyone stared at her. And then at me. I didn't understand what I was doing there. These people aren't like us. I don't belong here!

In Bob's narration, it is the hearing mothers who are strange. Yet because he and his mother are unique in this community, it is they who are different. These reactions contrast with a few informants who grew up in communities with a visible deaf population and generally felt less overt public difference.

Jean's description was typical of many informants' childhood memories of being watched and stared at:

> I remember being with my family at McDonalds. We were all just [pantomimes signing and talking]. We'd be sitting at this table and there would be a row of tables all around us -- all empty. All the other tables were full. And everyone was looking at this one table. Our table. Everybody is staring at us like we're putting on some kind of show. I felt like we were in a fishbowl!

Yet, Jean's example still begs the question: why was outsider curiosity necessarily perceived as negative? Langer and colleagues (1976) suggest that it is the novel which promotes outsider interest rather than an intent to stigmatize. Yet, informants' narratives reveal that strangers' interest in their parents' deafness <u>was</u> often paternalistic and stigmatizing.

> Even strangers would come up and ask, "How did your Mommy and Daddy become deaf and dumb?" And when I told them, then they always shook their heads. "Oh, that's too bad."

Stranger's choice of words such as "deaf and dumb" as well as by their reactions of pity or sadness promoted a negative association with outsider interest. In the company of their deaf families, informants were often thought to be deaf as well. Many had opportunities to overhear comments which reinforced their sense of being looked at as stigmatizing:

> How many times were we sitting with our families and everybody thinks we're deaf. And we can hear what the hearing people are saying. All those laughs they're making. They're saying deaf people're dumb or creepy or they're thieves. They think you're deaf too, but you can hear this. So, what are you supposed to do?

When difference became stigmatizing, informants recalled trying to sustain their intrinsic sense of normalcy against

those views imposed by others. Linda and Tom both remembered their struggles to sort out family and societal versions of normalcy:

> [Linda:] Growing up, I was teased a lot. Kids made fun of how Mom talked. They made fun of her expressions. And, you know, it was hard to separate it out. But in my home, that's my Mom. That's her way. That's what we do. They use all these expressions, they make these noises which is their very own voice.

> [Tom:] Sometimes I was ashamed. When I was in a restaurant with my family, hearing people would stare at us. People would stare at us. I turned around and looked at them. "What the fuck you looking at? Stop looking at me, mother-fuckers!" Sometimes they just hit my chord. My mother and father were fine. What were those people looking at? I don't know those people. What do they want?

Overhearing conversations coupled with the ability to speak prompted many to respond.[3] Stigma management and disavowal on behalf of deaf family members and/or on behalf of oneself were often intertwined as Ray's description suggests:

> I can remember being on buses where I wouldn't talk. I would be sitting there with my sister and her friends and they'd be all animated and signing. I would hear the people on the bus going, "Isn't that sad, it's so sad. They really shouldn't be out in public." So as we were getting off the bus I would say, "Yeah, it's really sad that you're out in public too!" People would just drop their eye teeth. I wouldn't say anything until I walked by them. Then I let 'em have it.

Reactions varied according to a constellation of individual, family and community factors. Ralph grew up in a town in which the state school for the deaf was located; the Deaf community was large and visible:

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[3] Higgins (1980) describes how hearing family members and friends are more likely than deaf people to tell others off if they stare (p. 129 -130).

> I never really overheard people making fun of my parents. I never felt that my parents were ever ridiculed. Never. I never felt defensive. They could defend themselves very well. I never had to deal with that...It was never really an issue. The kids, my friends knew my parents were deaf. There were a lot of deaf people in our town. People had no problem with it. Occasionally, some stranger would refer to my parents as being 'deaf and dumb'. That will always drive me up the wall. It still drives me crazy.

As Donna pointed out, assuming the role of protector frequently occurred without parents' knowledge:

> No, of course I didn't tell them. It would just have hurt them. What for? They've been hurt enough.

Many parents had long since developed their own responses to stigma, typically one of resignation or indifference:

> I asked my father, "Doesn't it make you mad? How can you not be mad?" And he just looked at me and said, "It's not worth it. Just ignore them. They don't know any better."

In retrospect, many informants acknowledged that some of their sensitivity to public scrutiny may partially have been a factor of their developmental age:

> As I got older and knew better, it didn't bother me. I knew it was just a fact of life. That you had to accept it. You weren't ashamed, it was just the fact that they were just people who were different. I never never for a moment -- once I grew up -- never was ashamed of my parents. People say I was, but I never was ashamed.

Others suggested that hearing people's choice of words or responses were probably unintentionally negative; many excused these strangers as uninformed or "ignorant." Yet, whether because of their own sensitivity or strangers' insensitivity, many of these childhood interpretations did not have the

benefit of adult hindsight and became part of an enduring emotional heritage of childhood difference.

> People would stare at us or come up to us on the street and ask me, "What's wrong with your Momma and Daddy? Why are you moving your hands like that?" I felt uncomfortable a lot growing up.
>
> People don't realize that deaf parents have feelings, that we have feelings. Our feelings just have been ignored. So when people called our parents dummies, we had to deal with our feelings at an early age.

Wariness of public scrutiny did not only come from hearing outsiders. It often came from their own parents as well. Previous chapters, particularly Chapter 2, described how many informants' parents were exposed to life-long prejudice and stigma: their own families frequently rejected or minimized them; educational systems separated them out as different and denied them alternate forms of communication; restrictive employment opportunities limited their economic power. Although informants repeatedly pointed out their parents' valiant efforts to rise above life-long oppression, internalized stigma and devalued status often took its toll across generations. Ortner (1974) describes a parallel situation among many women's experiences: "For it would seem that, as a conscious human and member of culture, she has followed out the logic of culture's arguments and has reached culture's conclusions along with the men" (p. 169).

Signing was an easy target for mockery by childhood peers:

> God, when I went to the store, the other kids would be there, and they would all make these weird gestures and wag their tongues. "Here comes the dummies' kid!" "Here comes the dummies' kid!"

Grosjean (1982) suggests that language status frequently correlates with the socioeconomic status of the linguistic group. Until recently, sign language was both an economic liability and a social stigma. One of the most evident battlegrounds of stigmatization among the Deaf is signing which, as Higgins notes, "makes deaf people visible." Self-consciousness about signing came from both the child as well as the parent. Many informants also described the disparity between their parents' unrestricted signing within the home and "signing small" or not at all in public.

> It's kind of funny. I would tell my mother or father not to speak too loud and they would tell me not to sign too big. We all had to be careful.

As children, many informants were socialized in this "alien community" in contradictory ways: the experience of deafness as normal and the reactions to deafness as stigmatizing. These perspectives maintained the boundary between the Deaf and the Hearing worlds.

Courtesy Stigma

Goffman (1963) proposes two groups of people who are sympathetic to those with stigma: the Own and the Wise. Informants fall into both categories. The Own are those who share the same stigma; hearing children were often presumed to be deaf like their parents. The Wise are those who are normal

but intimately familiar and sympathetic to those who are stigmatized. Jack had been discussing the more recent social acceptance of sign language. While expressing gratitude for this change, Jack also pointed out lingering childhood memories and associations:

> I think a lot of us have that experience... maybe not now because of all the attention to sign language, but growing up -- to use sign or to be associated with sign was an incredibly negative experience. I can remember at sixteen making a decision that if I could get out I would get away as far as I could.

Jack's description suggests a second dimension of stigma for those who are Wise: courtesy stigma. Goffman described the tendency for stigma to spread from the stigmatized individual to family and friends as 'courtesy stigma' -- that is, stigma by association. Research on courtesy stigma within the family has been generally restricted to parents and siblings of disabled children. However, for these men and women, it is their parent who appears primarily stigmatized. How does courtesy stigma differ from stigma?

Informants' feelings of being "courtesy stigmatized" because they had deaf parents were often indistinguishable from being stigmatized as if they themselves were deaf. In many situations, these women and men were presumed to be deaf as well. They were both the Own and the Wise. Goffman suggested two possible differences for those with courtesy stigma: the possibility of avoiding or terminating the relationship with the stigmatized person; or, for those who maintained an on-going relationship, sharing the discredit and

deprivation but not the defense of self-elevation.[4] When it existed, the desire to avoid association with their parents because of stigma was usually a childhood phenomenon.

> Oh, God, I never wanted my parents to come with me [to school functions]. When I had to take the invitation home from school, I always managed to lose it. [Laughs.] But when they started mailing them out, I was stuck!

As adults, those few informants who discontinued their relationship with their parents cited not stigma but rather concerns with over-responsibility or "just wanting to be with hearing people."

The second aspect of courtesy stigma -- sharing the stigma but not the self-elevation -- was true among informants in two different senses. First, there was a more immediately concrete application of this difference: although both parents and children may have shared strangers' stares, unlike their parents, informants could overhear stigmatizing remarks. They were less able to ignore or dismiss this added auditory input. Second, because of the growing militancy and self-advocacy among Deaf people, adult informants were increasingly less likely to be seen as full-fledged members of the Deaf community. For a few informants, the common heritage of difference they shared with the Deaf was apparently suspended.

The extra dimension of both seeing and hearing

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[4] 'Self-elevation' refers to the ability to reject disparaging remarks because they were made by those 'others': those not similarly stigmatized -- in this case, by <u>hearing</u> people. Roger was describing how his schoolmates made fun of his parents and him and he added, "That's just how <u>hearing</u> people act" [emphasis added].

stigmatizing responses suggests a third aspect of courtesy stigma for this population. Many informants not only experienced the normalcy of deafness, but often perceived its loss more acutely than their parents. Sometimes this perspective was generated by their hearing relatives (Chapter 3), sometimes by hearing strangers. Yet, many informants themselves assessed their parents' deafness within the context of their own hearing lives:

> Sometimes I would just love to be able to have my parents hear music. I just can't imagine what it is like not to have that in your life.

In this regard, those with courtesy stigma may be more aware of the differentness and the perceived deficiencies than those directly stigmatized. Joe's declaration that he was "more deaf than deaf people because most of them grew up in a hearing family" is both an affirmation of cultural membership as well as the suggestion of a more fully realized experience. Is it possible to fully understand what it is like to be deaf without knowing what it is like to be hearing?

Passing and Stigma Disavowal

Given an identity and association that is potentially stigmatizing, this population has the potential either to accept their difference or to disconnect from it. Two informants corroborate these options:

> Sometimes I would just let them think I was deaf. One time this guy yelled right in my ear, but I didn't bat an eye.

> I remember this time I was with some friends and we saw these deaf people. I didn't look them [deaf people] in the eye. I was afraid it would show. ["What would show?"] Oh, that I was connected to them somehow. I wasn't ready for it.

Because of their childhood responsibilities and family ties, informants had limited opportunities to distance themselves from their parents as children. Informants usually shrugged off the issue of disclosure -- "Well, everybody knew" -- or looked at it as inevitable: "Well, they found out when they came over to the house and walked in the front door." However, as adults in a complex, heterogeneous and mobile society, informants' past and present biographies could contradict. Their history of stigma need be known only to themselves. Page (1984) suggests:

> It should be remembered that we are all likely to limit the amount of information we disclose about our private lives during brief discussions with comparative strangers. Indeed, we would be surprised if brief acquaintances violated the rules of social etiquette by divulging intimate details of private lives (p. 97).

Yet, embracing their family heritage -- however stigmatized -- also provides a sense of belonging within an often faceless and disconnected society. Devos (1977) suggests:

> American society promises mobility. It is a society that assumes ideally that no one needs to be stigmatized...The simple ideal, however, goes counter to psychological truth. Our emotional lives cannot be uprooted from past pain in the promised pursuit of happiness. Social mobility has its own price. How is one to measure the costs of bearing the heavy burden of a socially shameful minority or low-status inheritance on the one hand, versus the loss one suffers by casting off our intimate heritage, good or bad? (p. 227).

Did most of these women and men choose to conceal their family

history and pass as inalterably hearing?[5]

Informants' disclosure about having deaf parents -- as children but particularly as adults -- was very much dependent on context. For a few informants, only intimates knew of their family history. Most informants, however, found it to be the source of on-going adult identity:

> Oh, I don't know, I tell whoever. I mean, I don't wear a sign around my neck but I tell people. It's a part of who I am.

DeVos (1977) suggests that maintaining and acknowledging the connection to stigmatized parents is an affirmation of the relationship:

> An ethnic self derives from a sense of integrity that comes from the knowledge that we are true to those who have given us birth and life. Such integrity draws on some continuity with a commmunity of peers who have tempered our childhood experiences. This sense of integrity is stengthened when one or both parents are members of a depreciated ethnic minority. Thus, an ethnic identity may be maintained out of a sense of responsibility felt toward stigmatized parents...We accept and assume the stigmas of the past as marks of acceptance and love. To assume stigma is to accept parents (p. 227).

In addition to accepting their parents, acknowledging their potentially stigmatized history reveals two additional dimensions to informants' experiences: a dual heritage of difference which was not only stigmatizing but distinctive in a positive sense; and ressurecting their family history offered informants' the opportunity for on-going stigma disavowal on behalf of their deaf families.

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[5] Goffman describes passing as "the management of undisclosed discrediting information." Stigma. p. 42.

In a culture which paradoxically values homogeneity and heterogeneity, individual traits can be potential detractions or attributes. Despite responses that stigmatized their difference, most men and women recalled beneficial aspects of being different. Even though they were more likely to be sensitive to the negative aspects of difference as children, informants also remembered situations in which having deaf parents gave them positive attention from the hearing world:

> It was like clockwork. Sooner or later every teacher I had would have me come up to the front of the room and tell the class: What was it like to have deaf parents. Show us some signs. ["So, how did you feel about it?"] Oh, sometimes I was embarrassed, but a lot of times I liked it. I got to be the center of attention.

Other informants talked about how their specialness was positively recognized in the Deaf community as well:

> [In the deaf club] My Dad was always telling me to come over so he could brag about how I interpreted this or did that for him.

The shift between positive and negative evaluations of difference not only varied developmentally and in differing social contexts, but the ambivalence often occurred simultaneously as well.

Informants' narratives indicate that their difference was more often evaluated positively when they, not their parents, were the focus of attention. As adults, most informants were less concerned about difference as stigmatizing and offered several examples of how their family background distinguished them from others:

> I remember this time I was filling out all those college applications. You know, where you're supposed to say something about yourself that will make people think, Oh, I want this guy. Well, I talked about my parents and all that. I don't know for sure, but it was probably something that made them remember me.

Emphasizing their special form of differentness also depended on the situation. Several informants working as interpreters often minimized their family connections to others who were not deaf. These informants explained they did this not because of a sense of stigma, but because they wanted to retain a sense of uniqueness:

> I want to be known in my own right. I don't want them to think, Oh, that's all she can do, or Well, if my parents were deaf, I could sign just as well as she can.

The focus on themselves rather than their parents caused a sense of conflict among some informants. As Martha put it, "I felt like I was using my parents' deafness to my own advantage." Yet, more often, informants felt like they were affirming their family heritage. Page (1984) proposes that "the extent to which individuals engage in passing is likely to depend on whether they accept or reject that a particular attribute is evidence of inferiority" (p. 22). For most adult informants, being deaf was decidedly <u>not</u> a mark of inferiority.

Acknowledging their family history also gave informants a potential forum to destigmatize deafness. Researchers have described encounters between those who are stigmatized and those who are not. Initial encounters are typically cumbersome, strained and inhibited. Interaction and prolonged

contact has generally been found to reduce prejudice and stigmatization. Yet, Goode (1978) qualifies these findings by noting that exchanges which are "stylized, socially distant and unequal" will sustain rather than diminish stereotypes (p. 90). Goode's qualification can be taken a step further by recognizing not only the importance of how these interactions take place, but whether they can occur at all. Access to interaction is often precluded by class differences and social isolation. The condition of deafness presents an intrinsic barrier to interaction. As Higgins (1980) suggests "Unlike many other outsiders' 'failings,' deafness does inhibit interaction with the larger social world, regardless of whether the deaf are stigmatized or not" (p. 143) [emphasis added]. Informants often provided a means of destigmatization through direct facilitation of encounters between the Deaf and the hearing. By acknowledging their deaf heritage as adults, informants could continue this advocacy by forging new inroads into a world often impenetrable to their deaf parents.

Advocacy also tempered how informants responded to the question of difference. Several informants like Brian told me: "No, we weren't different at all." Brian went on to explain that he and his family did all the usual things that families do:

> We watched tv, had dinner, went to movies...sometimes we'd fight, sometimes we'd tell jokes. Just because I had deaf parents didn't make my life different.

Brian identified difference as a negative attribute. Cheryl

and Gene adopted similarly negative interpretations in describing outcomes of difference in their parents' lives:

> [Cheryl:] My father wasn't treated any differently...and I think that's why he didn't feel inferior because he was deaf.

> [Gene:] Mom was always treated differently from the rest of her family. She always felt inferior, like she couldn't do anything.

Yet, difference cannot be reified into a singular state. Gene talked about how his grandparents "refused to see my Dad was different" and this caused a life-long pattern of denial: "They just didn't want to admit they had a deaf son." Difference was a blessing and a curse. Almost all informants felt their childhoods had given them compassion and empathy for others who were different -- even though they themselves were often conflicted by their own heritage of difference.

Having a Deaf Child

Thus far, this chapter has considered differences centered on having deaf parents. Yet, all informants -- as children and as adults -- were touched by other kinds of differences as well. Some of these differences mirror distinctions within the larger hearing society such as being a racial minority or being gay. Other informants represented minorities within their communities by their religious affiliation or economic status. Some differences were intrinsic to a deaf family such as being the one family member who did not sign or being the only hearing child among deaf

parents and siblings. Although any one of these differences usually represented only a handful of informants, they were an integral part of that individual informant's childhood and adult experiences. Time and length constraints do not permit exploration of these important considerations which augment and compound the experience of difference.

This section considers another context of difference which was more widespread among informants: having a deaf child. Concerns about having a deaf child shadowed almost all informants -- even though the probability of this occurring was usually no greater than among the general population. (Also, see Chapter 2, footnote #4, p. 83.) The anticipated stigma of having a deaf child broadens the parameters of difference, shifting from backward glances of informants' parents and their own childhoods to a possible future of difference as well.

At least half of all profound hearing losses in childhood occur as a result of genetic causes (Fraser 1976). Although genetic research has proliferated within the past few years, hereditary causes of deafness are extremely heterogeneous and remain difficult to isolate. Most are not distinguishable by clinical features. Perhaps because of these uncertainties, only one-tenth of all informants mentioned genetic causes of their parents' deafness. Several informants reported that although they suspected a genetic basis for deafness, they had been given other explanations:

> My grandparents insisted that my mother wasn't born deaf. She got sick somehow. So then out of nowhere this deaf cousin turns up. And then another one.

Ablon (1988) writes that "Expectant parents everywhere characteristically await the birth of the 'perfect child' -- a beautiful baby with all the attributes that their society values" (p. 1). Unlike deafness related to illness or accidents, genetic origins of deafness are less explicit. The detection of deafness was often not apparent to informants' grandparents, and expectations of a hearing child often lasted well beyond the first few months of birth:

> They said it wasn't 'til she [mother] was about three years old that they finally realized something was wrong with her hearing. And when they found out she was born deaf, they couldn't understand how they could have missed it. It wasn't like she was their first child. But...well, they just never even noticed it.

Because the majority of informants apparently did not carry a genetic marker for deafness, and because many of those who did would have needed to pair with a partner who carried the identical genetic marker in order for their child to be born deaf, it was highly improbable that most informants would have a deaf child. Yet, despite this unlikelihood, the question of hereditary deafness frequently shadowed informants in adult life:

> How many parents of my dates have asked me if the deafness is genetic. And, I'm like, if they think their son is interested in me, I want to say, Screw you! It makes me so mad.

Another informant:

> My mother-in-law kept grilling me how my parents became deaf. She wanted to be sure that it wouldn't happen to any of her grandchildren. As if she gave birth to all perfect children.

As indicated by the above two remarks, informants were frequently sarcastic and angered over interrogations and negative implications of having a deaf child. Such reactions from outsiders was a family insult to their parents and to themselves as well.

Informants were generally non-plussed at the possibility of having a deaf child; several welcomed it. Mary Ann responded quickly to the question:

> I would love to have a deaf child. I think I would be a great parent for a deaf kid. Who better? I know it would be hard, it would be difficult. See, I really don't think deaf people have a disadvantage. I just think it's different for them...I think a lot of deaf people think, including my mother, and my Dad probably does too, that if I could hear I'd have a better life. And that's not necessarily true. It's what you make of your life that makes it better, your quality of life has a lot to do with how you feel about yourself.

Yet, a few informants -- particularly those who felt they had a serious chance of having a deaf child -- were ambivalent and shared their private concerns about having children:

> I wouldn't say this to most people, but I know how different it can be. Before I had children, I had to make sure. I wanted to know exactly what the chances were.

A few men and women acknowledged that the stress of raising a child who was different might have been too great on their marriages; others felt they had "done enough for one lifetime." Several informants agonized whether or not to risk

having a deaf child and in a few cases made a decision not to have children. Yvonne explained how going for genetic counseling became a family and a cultural issue:

> If you don't know the origin of your parents' deafness, then it is an unknown. It becomes a big concern. I knew I could cope with it, but I didn't want that child to go through life and have such a rough go of it. I was concerned about how my husband would react. Would he learn sign language? How would it affect our marriage? When my mother found out I was going for genetic counseling, she asked me, "Why? Nothing wrong with having a deaf child. I hope my grandchild _is_ deaf." She felt rejected. I felt guilty and embarrassed. She was coming from a deaf perspective. I was coming from a hearing perspective. I never brought it up again. I just kept my worries and my fears to myself.

John had been talking about how different he felt as a child because of his parents' deafness and how this pivotal issue had been resurrected by having a deaf child.

> I thought when my parents were dead then I would be out of the deaf world, but now that I have a deaf daughter I see I'm going to be in it for the rest of my life.

Although all five informants who actually had a deaf child felt their family background was a major asset in understanding and raising their deaf child(ren), these informants also acknowledged that having a deaf child was not the same as having a deaf parent. Several described how they struggled with balancing the difference: recognizing it yet not making too much of it. Two informants described how they "gave in" to their spouses who preferred their deaf child not be sent off to a residential school or taught sign language. When I asked these informants why they went counter to their

own beliefs, Roy described his own lingering doubts about a life of difference:

> I hate to say it, but I guess somehow I still wanted her to be normal. Even after all that my parents had to go through, you know, trying to make them talk when they couldn't. Yet, I ended up letting them try to do the same thing with my daughter. My wife thought our daughter could be just like anybody else, not like my parents. And I guess there was a part of me that wanted to believe it was possible...It was such a mistake.

Most informants told me they could see themselves having a deaf child but not a deaf spouse. What was the difference? Informants themselves offered varying explanations. Rita described how having a deaf child was accepting fate; but a deaf spouse was a choice.

> Deafness happens. So, if I have a deaf kid, it happens. But I'm not going to go out and choose a deaf person to marry.

Informants also stressed differing expectations for being a parent than being a life partner. Many informants proposed their family experiences and roles were ideal for raising a deaf child:

> If I had a deaf child, I feel like I'd have a chance to get them on their feet, help them realize they can do almost anything. I wouldn't burdened my kid with all those negative things that hearing people put on deaf people.

When I asked Scott how a deaf child raised by him would be any different from other deaf children, he replied:

> For one thing, my child wouldn't feel left out, not talked to, not knowing what was going on. He wouldn't feel different.

Yet, most informants did not want to continue this type of

relationship with a spouse. Informant after informant stressed wanting to have a partner that was the same as them (see Chapter 2, pp. 73-75). Informants also felt it was just as important for a deaf person to have a deaf spouse. Although many informants thought an equal relationship with a deaf partner was possible, most conceded it was unlikely.

> Oh, it'd be hard for him [a possible deaf husband] and hard for me. We'd both probably fall right back into the same old patterns. [signs: "I need you to interpret for me. Please."] and me going right along and doing it.

A deaf child offered the possibility of rectifying the past, and providing the communication and family support which many parents and other deaf adults had struggled to find.

Having either a deaf partner or a deaf child could be viewed as a way informants could continue their deaf heritage. But for most informants, only one of these alternatives seemed plausible. This suggests a recapitulation of many informants' relationship to Deaf culture. Margaret Mead (1953) had proposed that "Any member of a group, provided that his position within that group is properly specified, is a perfect sample of the group-wide pattern on which he is acting as an informant" (p. 648). This group of informants shifts Mead's emphasis on a phantom cultural center: their position is part of their cultural experience. These men and women experienced Deaf culture as the hearing children of deaf parents. Because they could hear, informants could function in a hearing world in ways their parents could not. Their difference alternated between being deaf and being hearing, between sharing the

stigmatizing aspects of difference with their parents and partaking of the distinction of difference as their hearing children. Informants paradoxically rejected the negative difference that outsiders made of their parents deafness while acknowledging that being deaf <u>was</u> different than being hearing. This paradox was familiar within the context of parent and child, but not between spouses or peers.

Considerations of having a deaf child or spouse are largely hypothetical. Most hearing children of deaf parents neither marry a deaf person nor have a deaf child. Yet, most informants maintained their relationship with the Deaf world in other ways. Almost half of these women and men worked in careers involving the Deaf; a number of them continued to socialize with deaf people as well as participate in Deaf social events. These situations provided informants with opportunities to reclaim their own unique identity of difference: minimizing the negative impliations of difference to hearing people and remembering the normalcy of difference when among the Deaf.

<u>Summary</u>

In the lyrical and poignant stories of <u>The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat</u> Oliver Sacks suggests that masking or altering a person's condition risks losing the creativity and the spark that made the person unique. The condition of deafness provided deaf people entry into a different world

while they continued to tangle with the hearing world in unique and special ways. In the struggle, some were victorious, some became victims -- changed, inspired or defeated by the physical mark which has such profound social consequences. These informants wear a badge of difference that is invisible to most, one that represents their parents' history and their own struggle with difference. It evokes memories of both stigma and distinction. Bretherton (1985) writes that "It is not a person's internal working model of attachement figures...per se but how the person construes these internal models in adulthood that appears to be involved in intergenerational transmission" (p. 55). The paradox of being different is that it becomes apparent only in comparison and, for many informants, only when they stepped away from their family of difference.

As adults, most informants had increasing opportunities to minimize or disclaim their heritage. Yet, few did. Goffman suggested that:

> It is often assumed, and with evidence, that the passer will feel torn between two attachments. He will feel some alienation from his new group, for he is unlikely to be able to identify fully with their attitude to what he knows he can be shown to be (1963: 87).

For most of these men and women, it is not that they will be shown to really be deaf or even that they have deaf parents. It is that they may be shown to be just hearing. And to be hearing is to be identified with the group that has stigmatized and oppressed. As members of an interactive

complex society, hearing children of deaf parents participated in the dialectical process of the stigmatized and the stigmatizing. DeVos's (n.d.) emphasis on this dual heritage is noteworthy among these informants:

> A number of [studies] do not distinguish sufficiently between growing up in an ethnic minority situation and growing up in a traditional culture...Granted, differences in cultural backgrounds produce differences in cognitive patterns of social institutions and learning. These patterns have a different meaning in situations of cultural isolation than they do in situations in which the individual is being socialized in a traditional pattern (as part of a minority subculture) (p. 2).

Higgins (1980) reiterates that "Deaf people can only be understood in relationship to their position in a hearing world. To view them outside that context is fundamentally to distort their experiences" (p. 175). These informants have a unique position with regard to perspectives on difference: difference not only about deafness, but about being hearing as well. The next chapter is a companion chapter to this one, and examines how informants sorted themselves out between these two frequently dichotomized worlds: the Deaf and the Hearing.

SECTION III: CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPES

CHAPTER 9: HYPHENATED LIVES

> When I turned 18, my father took me aside. He pointed out the window and said [signs, "The time is coming. Soon you must go. That's your world out there. The Hearing world. You belong there."] For eighteen years I had grown up deaf, and now all of a sudden I'm supposed to be hearing? I looked at him and said, [signs, "What do I know about the Hearing world? I hear, yes. I speak, yes. But I thought I was deaf."] My father smiled and [signs "True, you're deaf, but you're hearing too."] I grew up deaf. I guess now I'm hearing. But some part of me still feels deaf.

Introduction

This informant's dilemma captures the sense of liminality[1] and paradox frequently expressed among many adult hearing children of deaf parents interviewed for this study. Marks of difference frequently polarize human communities into two groups, each clinging to separate practical and symbolic histories. Male -- Female. Black -- White. Gay -- Straight. Often these dichotomies seem natural. Hermaphrodites, people of mixed-races and bisexuals mystify us and make us anxious. Sapir (1924) suggests that "we disagree on the value of

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[1] Turner (1967) outlined the attributes of liminality, of "threshold people": [They] are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions (p. 95).

things and the relations of things, but often enough we agree on the particular value of a label...It is only when the question arises of just where to put the label, that the trouble begins" (p. 308).

What explains this tendency to categorize, to separate one group of people from another -- and, often to assign negative or positive attributes to one group against the other? Is separating and labeling an inherent part of the human condition? Levi-Strauss proposes an innate rather than cultural basis for thinking in binary, opposed categories. Recent child development research examines the possibility that the act of separating out those different from oneself is indeed an inherent developmental process, possibly arising from early childhood projection and individuation (Ainlay 1986). In The Need to Have Enemies and Allies, Volkan (1988) proposes such a psychological need within early child development. Volkan explores the development of a cohesive sense of self and of others within which the concept of the enemy is interwoven. Volkan suggests that this individual psychological drive to develop a schema of ally or enemy becomes the precursor for shared enemies and allies based upon culturally constructed notions of similarities and differences such as ethnicity, race or religion.

Other writers have examined the cultural

construction and implications of dichotomies. Hsu, DuBois and others described the American predilection for oppositional categories. In his classic study of American national character, Hsu (1972) observed "pictures of contradictions with little or no attempt to reconcile the opposing elements" (p. 378). DuBois (1955) notes that "oppositional propositions are a consistent aspect of Western European culture" (p. 1232). Despite the appearance of a flourishing multi-ethnic and multi-racial population, recent national events such as the 1991 Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas or the 1992 Los Angeles riots demonstrate the staggering polarity which continues to exist between genders and between races.

Researchers add their own distortions to the construction or embellishment of dichotomizations. Researchers may infer artificial memberships within a group or relationships between such members. Turner (1967) warns that "one of the main characteristics of ideological interpretations is that they tend to stress the harmonious and cohesive aspect of social relationships" (p. 33). Dichotomous comparisons may accentuate greater internal homogeneity within each category or greater cross-category heterogeneity than in fact exists. Fitzgerald (1977) suggests cultural and personal reasons for such researcher bias: "In our

culture we often expect "either/or" types (stereotypes). Anthropologists are not immune to this weakness, especially when it concerns an area about which they are emotionally uneasy" (p. 390).

My selection of informants -- hearing children of deaf parents -- may overemphasize dichotomy. I did not, for example, look at deaf parent-deaf child families. Yet, the dichotomization between Deaf and Hearing is not only supported by numerous studies of deaf people (Higgins 1980; Becker 1980; Foster 1989; Wilcox 1989; Padden & Humphries 1988; Evans 1991), it is a prominent theme continuously generated among these informants as well. Chapter 2 (pp. 55-59) described the lack of gradations among those identified as deaf despite actual physiological variations. Social, educational, economic and individual differences were all subsumed by the critical delineation: are you deaf or are you hearing?[2] This chapter explores the construction of polarized categories of Deaf and Hearing and considers the enigmatic identity of these informants. The concern here is not the shifting and sometimes conflicting membership within each category but what each category represents. These categories depict not only a polarized history

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[2] Meadow (1981) notes that the first question that deaf children and teenagers will ask a visitor to their school is, "Are you deaf or hearing?" This is seen as part of the process of placing themselves in their world.

between two groups, they also provide informants with a way to talk about themselves and their relationship to others.

Membership in one category is invariably related to and determined by the other. Douglas (1986) observes:

> Defilement is never an isolated event. It cannot occur except in view of a systematic ordering of ideas...the only way in which pollution ideas make sense is in reference to a total structure of thought whose keystone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation (p. 309).

Each side of the equation contributes definitions, boundaries and meanings for themselves and their counterparts. Both perspectives provide not only an understanding of each experience, but an exploration of more broadly-based social and cultural factors which are shared as well as those which maintain the polarization. Between apparently mutually exclusive categories, there are frequent overlaps -- resulting in ambiguities, paradoxes and re-alignments. The previous chapter focused on difference. This chapter asks, How can different be the same?

Being the Same

As young children, most informants remembered little sense of their parents' deafness as remarkable, or that they were somehow different from their parents. This follows expected developmental patterns in which young

children remain strongly identified with their parents. Because most informants' parents socialized exclusively with other deaf people, their early home life provided a homogeneous environment with little opportunity for comparisons between being hearing or deaf:

> We were a family. My Mom, my Dad, and me. There was nothing strange about it.

Although many women and men felt their parents were not partial to having a deaf or hearing child, more than half of all informants indicated their parents had definite preferences -- usually for a hearing child. Anna said her mother got angry at deaf people who wanted deaf children.

> My mother yells at deaf people who say they want to have deaf children -- she scolds them: You're wrong! It's a mean thing to do! You're terrible!

Yet, a few informants said their parents would have preferred a deaf child. Ted felt his mother's choice made sense.

> One time I asked my mother. And she was quiet for a while and then she looked at me. [Signs, 'It would have been easier if we were the same, deaf - deaf.'] And she's probably right.

Several informants commented on what appeared to be a growing number of younger deaf parents who wanted <u>deaf</u> children. The stigma of having a 'defective' child was increasingly displaced by having a child who was like themselves and shared the same standard of normalcy. Ablon (1984) comments on a similar trend among those

dwarfs who have developed a more positive self-image and are less conflicted about having a child like themselves.

Most informants were known to be hearing at birth. In a few instances, informants were initially assumed to be deaf. This was especially true if there were several generations of deaf people within the family. Two informants recounted that it was not until school-age that they were discovered to be hearing. Ruth explained that it was not that she could not hear; the act of hearing simply had little significance:

> Sure, I remember hearing things. I guess I always heard things. But I didn't know that I was supposed to let anybody know. I mean, why should I? We could see what was going on around us. If I heard it too, well, I guess that was just extra...Or maybe it just wasn't important.

Sahlins (1976) suggests that even the physical world is shaped and interpreted by cultural context. Situations such as those described by these informants underscore that hearing or deafness -- as criterion for membership in one of two worlds -- needs a context in which these conditions are evaluated and become socially meaningful.

Learning the Difference

One source which emphasized the distinction between being hearing or deaf was pragmatic. As children, most informants' hearing and speaking abilities provided an obvious resource for the family's communication system. Informants' communication abilities distinguished them

from their deaf parents. Yet, a categorical alignment was not straightforward. Family responsibilities often distinguished them from hearing peers with hearing parents. Although the degree of interaction with these hearing peers varied among informants, almost all informants felt some degree of difference from their peers. Informants frequently described themselves as "special," "burdened," "more responsible," "more mature," "different" than their peers.

Both family and outsiders contributed to the construction of a polarized world. Hearing and deafness -- each expanded from a strictly functional condition into one of considerable social importance. Walter's description exemplifies how categories were constructed by deaf parents:

> In my family, every day there was a debate or a refinement or a comment about the implications of deafness. Everybody was identified either as deaf or hearing. Every issue, every piece of communication was, deaf do this. Hearing do that. Deaf way, hearing way. Deaf world, hearing world.

Informants reported that their parents attributed a number of characteristics to hearing people. Although all such attributions were not consistent, the two characteristics most frequently mentioned were: "hearing people can't always be trusted," and "hearing people know everything."

> My father always distrusted hearing people. Still does. He would say to me, "Oh, that guy's going to raise the price because we're deaf, he thinks we're dumb -- he's going to take advantage of us."

Derek, who had a deaf mother and hearing father, remembered his mother telling Larry that he was very smart but stubborn -- just like his hearing father. He said his mother could not understand why they were both so stubborn when they could hear. The generalizations, stereotypes and assumptions about hearing people contrasted with depictions of deaf people which -- whether positive or negative -- generally included much more detailed physical, behavioral and personal characteristics.

Complementing the family's evaluation of hearing people were public reactions to deaf people which reinforced feelings of separateness and difference. Communication differences emphasized the dichotomy with the larger Hearing culture by decreasing the possible interaction. Chapter 8 described how informants were frequently mistaken as being deaf. Prevalent moral evaluations of deafness and responses to deaf people also augmented informants' desire not to identify with those who stigmatized. Lorraine was unforgiving in her condemnation of hearing people:

> My parents have gotten ripped off by hearing people. And have gotten shit on by hearing people and treated like shit. My Dad's lost jobs, you know. I can't believe the cruelty from hearing people, you know, people he works with. And they laugh at him, and then they don't even do it behind his back.

Although many other informants pointed out positive interactions between their parents and hearing people, they rarely identified themselves as hearing people. When I asked Ron whether he considered himself hearing or deaf, he qualified his answer:

> Well, I can hear. Of course! But, well, I don't know that I'd say that I'm a quote "hearing" person. That's different.

Ron's remarks reiterate that cultural affiliation and functional condition are not equivalent within the Deaf community. As summarized in Chapter 2 (p. 56), "one can be deaf regardless of hearing or speaking abilities, and being deaf ideally includes an attitude of self-acceptance and social interaction with other deaf people."

Affiliation issues extended into the larger Deaf community as well. Hearing children of deaf parents have been described as the only full-fledged hearing members of the Deaf community (Higgins 1980; Sacks 1989). Yet, here too, membership was problematic. Padden and Humphries (1988) provide a telling example of how the Deaf community vacillates whether their own hearing children are members of the Deaf community. A local deaf

club attempted to allow a hearing son of deaf parents to play in an exclusively deaf basketball tournament by labeling him hard-of-hearing. This ploy eventually failed when he was asked to take an audiological exam by tournament officials who were also deaf. However, as the authors note, "The club probably would not have tried to violate the rules if the hearing player had not had Deaf parents" (p. 49). Many informants described how they would sometimes confuse other deaf people by their sign language fluency.

> This deaf man asked me if I was deaf or hearing. And when I told him, we just kept on talking about stuff. But it's like he needed a basis upon which to interact with me or judge me.

Two important exceptions to membership in the Deaf community surfaced during these interviews. Ironically, the two features of the Deaf community which have such salience for the Deaf -- their language and their peer association -- were absent among many of these informants. As described in Chapter 6, nearly one-fifth of these men and women did not consider themselves fluent or did not use American Sign Language as children -- even if this was the principal communication system used by their parents.

> My parents signed to each other, but my mother insisted that I not sign to her. I had to speak to her. First of all, she didn't want me to become dependent on signs to communicate. Secondly, she didn't want me to lose out, as best as I can understand what her motives were, she was afraid that it might be a handicap to my oral development. She didn't want that to happen. So, I was not allowed to sign in the house...unless I was going to say something that she just couldn't get. In which case, I was to spell it out. I learned signs, but only to talk with her friends.

Secondly, most informants reported little contact with deaf peers while they were growing up (see Chapter 4, p. 119-121). Even the presence of these hearing children in the Deaf community set them apart: deaf children were usually absent -- either because they were attending residential schools for the deaf or because they were kept away by their hearing parents who perceived the Deaf community as socially deviant.

Sorting It Out

Amidst conflicting interpretations by the Hearing world and the Deaf world, informants discussed sorting out their own affiliation and identity. Vance remembered this scene when he was about 12 years old:

> My mother was going on and on about how she could never trust hearing people. And I looked at her and said, "Well what about me? I'm hearing." And she looked at me and said, "No, I didn't mean you. You're different."

As children, many informants were thought to be "deaf" when they really wanted to be seen as "hearing;" others were "hearing" when they wanted to be "deaf." Gender

research indicates that children typically react against being typecast (as masculine or feminine) until they can assert where in the spectrum they feel they fit (Basow 1986). In the tension between being deaf or hearing, Lorraine described her resistance:

> My parents kept telling me, "You should know, you're hearing." How come I'm supposed to know everything? Just because I'm hearing, they think I know everything. I <u>don't</u> know.

Lorraine's rejection of equating functional status with a particular attribute was mirrored by Barry:

> This one time this friend said, "Why do you go to those deaf meetings with all those deaf people? You're not deaf." And I said, Huh, a lot you know!

For many informants, the paradox of their ambiguous identity continued into adulthood. Despite appearing to matriculate within the Hearing world, a number of informants admitted they were not always comfortable with hearing people, nor did they necessarily identify themselves as a hearing person. Public perceptions of informants was also problematic because their deaf heritage was largely invisible; their familial link to a separate culture and identity was not readily apparent. Most informants identified themselves as variously deaf and hearing.

> ["Would you say you're hearing or deaf?"] Oh, I don't know, part deaf, part hearing. ["50-50?"] [Laughs.] Some days. Other times it's like 90-10 or 10-90. But there's always some part of me that's deaf and some part of me that's hearing.

A number of informants described how the hearing and deaf parts were "all mixed up" and many felt it was important to separate out what was hearing and what was deaf. Several used the concept of code-switching to explain how they alternated between the Deaf and Hearing worlds:

> I quickly learned that there was a Hearing world and a Deaf world and you did one thing in one place and another thing in another place. The hard thing for me is that when I am in the Hearing world I find it hard to stop talking about the deaf, to go to a party and not talk about deafness, not meet another deaf person -- I just want to be hearing...but when I am in the Deaf world, I want to be deaf. I know that sounds half and half, but I feel half and half.

The categories of deaf and hearing posed not only issues of membership, but a symbolic pairing. Many informants used these categories to talk about themselves: "the deaf part of me...the hearing part of me;" "in the Deaf world...in the Hearing world;" "deaf values...hearing values." Often, concerns and issues were directed at one pole or the other: "I never learned how to be hearing..." or "Only now am I beginning to understand the deaf part of me." Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that metaphors rather than categories themselves are the basis for behavior: a metaphor "connects our memories of our past...experiences and serves as a possible guide for future ones" (p. 140).

Although almost all informants acknowledged a polarity between the Deaf and Hearing worlds, at least one-third of these men and women did not describe the

dichotomy within themselves. Two circumstances seemed to mitigate these feelings: the degree which this polarity was experienced within their families, and the informant's family position and role. Unlike most informants, Cheryl's parents moved in both Hearing and Deaf social circles. She felt this decreased the sense of dichotomy. Although his parents socialized exclusively with other deaf people, Ken did not remember his parents attributing values or behaviors to deaf or hearing people per se: "They just treated people as they came -- didn't matter if they were deaf or hearing." The sense of internalized polarity was more pronounced among those informants who were the designated cultural mediators within their families. As Chapter 5 has described, this was often the oldest child or the oldest daughter. Other siblings also reported feeling both deaf and hearing, but appeared less conflicted about it. Yvonne's family illustrates differing emphases of the deaf-hearing dichotomy among three hearing siblings. Yvonne herself was the main family interpreter, and saw herself as "very much in the middle, in-between." She described herself: "I feel like I'm on both sides of the fence at the same time." One brother was "very deaf culture, I mean he's married to a deaf woman, works in a place that employs deaf workers, and has mostly deaf friends." She described her other sibling as having

nothing to do with deaf people and the one who had the least mediating responsibilities as a child.

Informants frequently described a sense of duality which was separate from hearing people as well as from deaf people. Although public identification as deaf or hearing could often be adapted to fit differing circumstances, informants' internalized sense of themselves was less dependent on external cues. For over half of these women and men, hearing <u>and</u> deaf -- both sides of the equation -- have been internalized...as well as the invisible chasm which connects and yet separates the two.

> I always felt like I didn't belong either place. I didn't belong with the deaf 100 per cent and I didn't belong with the hearing. I didn't feel comfortable with hearing. I felt more comfortable with deaf, but I knew I wasn't deaf. I feel like I'm somewhere in-between.

Emily evoked a sense of disorientation, of separateness from both the hearing and the deaf:

> When I was a little girl, I remember walking into the room and seeing my father signing into the air. He was talking to God. I couldn't understand what was going on, so I asked my mother what he was doing, who he was signing to. My mother looked at me and [fingerspells 'h-e-a-r-i-n-g' across her forehead. "You're hearing, you don't understand."] I had always felt different from other kids because of my parents. Now I realized I was even different from them.

Acknowledging their particular sense of liminality, however, potentially intensifies the separation between

informants and their deaf heritage. Several informants questioned how to assert their own identity without further stigmatizing or alienating their parents.

> Who am I gonna tell this to? Nobody's gonna understand, or they'll get the wrong idea.

Family allegiance was not the only concern. For hearing children within the Deaf community, identity and membership -- like all other deaf people -- depend not only on self-identification. Status is contingent on the Deaf community's sense of them as culturally familiar. Because hearing children already occupy a paradoxical position within this culture, the risks of alienation are all the more perilous. Lucy treasured her connection to the Deaf world:

> It's not my parents I worry about. They're both gone now. But it's the connection to other deaf people. That's still important to me...It's like what I felt right after Mom died. There were all these deaf people at the funeral. And they were telling me stories about my Mom. And then this woman I didn't know asked me if I was deaf [signs, "You're deaf, aren't you?"] These are my people, they know me, they know my deaf part. To risk losing that would be to risk losing myself.

Adult Informants and the Deaf Community

Within their families, hearing children often provided a crucial link between the Deaf world and the Hearing world. As adults, however, their role and their identity shifted into realms of greater uncertainty. Hearing children of deaf parents' ensconced role as

members of the Deaf community has become increasingly problematic in the context of recent social changes and in terms of their own adult development. First, paralleling many other minority groups, deaf people have become adamant in their demands for self-recognition and autonomy: Deaf for deaf. The recent Deaf rights movement re-aligns the messenger with the message: to speak for the deaf, you must be deaf. Power struggles, exemplified by the rejection of a hearing person named as President of Gallaudet University (the world's only university for the deaf) and the eventual installation of a deaf president dramatize this concern. Although overt confrontation was rare, informants frequently described a sense of personal conflict:

> If it's between me and a deaf person for a job, then it should go to the deaf person. But, you know, I feel like I know every bit as much about the Deaf world as they do. A lot of deaf people grew up in the Hearing world, they think hearing, they act hearing. I'm more deaf than a lot of them are!

Secondly, the extraordinarily popular fascination with adult children groups, introspection and childhood re-assessment resurrects long unsettled issues of identity. As adults, many informants described searching for appropriate analogies and interpretations of their family experiences. These adult self-explorations reflected a continued sense of conflicted identity and

oppositional categories:

> I think my parents didn't understand a hearing child. They had my deaf sister, and my sister did things as they expected. And they knew the people she was doing things with. And they were part of her world, or she was part of their world -- however you want to look at it. I wasn't. I never was going to be. I wasn't deaf. I had a whole different world that I dealt with. They didn't understand that world other than through me. And so I became the symbol for this whole other world which they didn't understand. And they didn't understand me. I was a problem. I kept trying to solve the problem that I never understood. I kept trying and trying, but I never could solve it. So one day I asked my mother, "Was I really a problem?" My mother sat for a while and she said, "You know what the problem was?" I said, "No." And she said, "The problem was you could hear."

Whether in one-on-one interviews or in regional meetings of adult hearing children, informants' preoccupation with their deaf parents underscores their mutual cultural heritage -- a heritage emphatically linked through their parents. Although many of the issues and struggles of hearing children of deaf parents parallel children of other ethnic and racial groups, there is one important difference. Within the Deaf community, the critical measure of cultural identity is neither degree of language proficiency nor shade of skin color nor knowledge of customs. It ultimately depends neither on declarations of allegiance nor degree of interaction. Above all, to be deaf is to <u>not</u> be hearing. This paradigm underscores why the emphasis on parental

linkage so crucial. Because hearing children share neither their parents' functional hearing loss nor, in many cases, their parents' language, the primary source of cultural identity and community entree is their connection with their parents. Only by association do these informants have access to this exclusive identity and this community: Mother Father Deaf.

Chapter 9 Summary

Perrin (1988) describes how both men and women share the same cultural milieu which provides opposing dynamics to the two genders. Men and women respond and are encouraged to respond to the same issues and needs differently. A similar polarity exists between deafness and hearing. In Voices from a Culture, Padden and Humphries (1988) describe a deaf girl who corrects her younger deaf sister's mistaken notion that someone can be deaf and hearing. The younger girl is seen as naive. She has not yet learned the way of the world: "No one is ever both Deaf and hearing at the same time. One is either Deaf or hearing" (p. 13). We are conditioned to think in categories, to make distinctions and to interpret them according to culturally specific standards of meaning and behavior -- even if they are "preponderantly spurious" (DuBois 1955: 1232). Although splitting is a normal developmental process, in many

cases we develop the capacity and the tolerance for ambivalence. Yet, those issues which remain individually or culturally charged continue to be polarized.

Chapter 8 pointed out that a critical means of destigmatization is missing for deaf people: spoken language. Communication difference also maintains the polarization between the Deaf and Hearing worlds. Yet, this lack of ambiguity also creates opportunities for a cultural community. Other disabilities or health conditions are less polarized against a phantom normalcy because they at least share a common language. Although the boundaries and the meanings of the categories of deaf or hearing have shifted over time and may vary individually, nevertheless they remain. As Padden and Humphries (1988) suggest: "All of these adjustments indicate how well the center accommodates and, at the same time, how tightly it holds" (p. 54).

There is tension around any variation from the "norm." In the Deaf world, the idealized center of the Deaf world reflects the long history of polarity with the Hearing world: non-speaking, signing, often those who are from multiple-generation deaf families: Those who are <u>not</u> hearing. Despite their oppositional status, these two cultures reflect a common ideology: in order to be normal, I must be the same as you. The women and men in this study represent exceptions to this rigid

dichotomization, a rift in the boundaries of two cultures. How do these opposing cultures resolve this disruption? The risk of anomaly is to be disenfranchised. Like their parents, many informants have been stigmatized by those who hear. Yet, the Deaf world's response to conflict reflects a similar pattern: to speak for the deaf, you must be deaf. This, too, endorses oppositional categories and ultimately disenfranchises many of their own people.

Informants' hyphenated lives provide a functional link between two worlds. Several months ago I spoke with an anthropologist who had been studying Malay humor systems. In Malay, most things are classified as either hot or cold. I asked her if there was anything that was neither hot nor cold. She said, "Yes, rice -- cederhana -- is neither hot nor cold; it is neutral. It is a mainstay." Informants' neutral metaphors of identity -- "in-between," "fence-sitting," [sign: 'half-and-half'] -- also represent the ballast between these two polarized worlds. Symbolically, if not practically, they provide the means of linkage. Yet, this connection is paradoxical. Hyphens connect but they also keep apart. Could the deaf and hearing meet without bridges, without these mediators? Goffman (1963) proposed an unalterable dichotomy: either to become members of a stigmatized group or to disavow such membership. Such continued

polarization ignores the real life possibilities of synthesis and transcendence. DeVos (1977) comments on the limitations of conceptual dichotomies:

> Ethnic background, while present and part of the self, is not the essential constituent of the individual as a human being. Transcendence of narrow ethnicity is desirable if we are to live together in some degree of harmony with others different from ourselves. Such transcendence is to be distinguished from passing" (p. 241).

These informants provide a vision of cultural conflict, but also of cultural resolution.

The men and women in this study provide a dialectic between two competing world views. Among characteristics and values frequently dichotomized as either Deaf or Hearing, these informants have inherited dual, often polarized interpretations of the meaning of deafness and the meaning of hearing. These conflicting perspectives demonstrate a central tenet of anthropology: the response and the meanings of human conditions are ultimately dependent on their social context. From hearing people, they understood deafness as brokenness, as stigma, as disability. From their parents, they experienced deafness as viable, as normal, as a cultural community. They learned that to be hearing is to be powerful but capable of oppression. They learned that they themselves are the exception to those who hear and those who are deaf. And, this liminality itself was often more distressing than being at one pole or the other. Adler

(1977) proposed a questionable outcome for those who live with two languages and two cultures:

> Often [bilinguals] have split minds...all the particularities which language conveys, historical, geographical, cultural, are re-embodied in the bilingual twice: he is neither here nor there; he is a marginal man (p 38).

Park (1950, Bruner (1972) and others have considered the issue of biculturalism. The next and final Chapter (10) will examine the question of marginality between two cultures -- as experienced both symbolically and practically by men and women who were both deaf <u>and</u> hearing.

CHAPTER 10: IDENTITY ON THE MARGINS OF CULTURE

Introduction to Chapter 10

At the close of The Scarlet Letter, Nathaniel Hawthorne turns his attentions to Pearl, Hester Prynne's daughter. What happened to that elfin child whose first earthly sight was that infamous scarlet mark on her mother's chest? It was Pearl who shared her mother's stigma and her mother's triumph, and whose childhood enveloped the practical and symbolic conflicts between her family and the larger social world. Yet, within the confines of Hawthorne's novel, Pearl's adult life remains forever mysterious:

> But where was little Pearl? If still alive, she must now have been in the flush and bloom of early womanhood. None knew -- nor ever learned, with the fullness of perfect certainty...But there was a more real life for Hester Prynne, here, in New England, than in that unknown region where Pearl had found a home.

This dissertation has been a voyage to an unknown region -- unknown to most hearing people and deaf people alike. This land of enigma and paradox is often difficult to appreciate or explain because of the tremendous chasm which separates the two cultures of the Deaf and the Hearing. In addition to differences in language and custom, the shadow of stigma often keeps this territory concealed from view. Although these inhabitants bear no visible mark, their dual heritage is an indelible part of who they are. These distant shores are frequently clouded by the temporal gulf which separates parent from child -- whether deaf or hearing. Research, too, has enhanced this disjunction by limiting its focus to defined periods of life -- most often that of childhood. As with Pearl, we are left to wonder about the fate of children now adults whose lives have continued well beyond the gaze of parent and researcher alike.

The previous chapters have touched upon family histories and childhood experiences which inform the present day lives of these 150 men and women. Amidst frequently oppositional worlds and within a uniquely defined template of individual, family and community variables, each informant has developed a narrative of self. Yet, apart from the distinct fabric of a Deaf family, informants have drawn from beliefs and values that prevail within the larger culture: that our identities are inextricably linked to our families of origin. In locating ourselves within a universe of meaning and chaos, we inevitably come to consider the significance of that place we called Home. The relationship between self and family lies at the heart of this final chapter.

Chapter 10 begins with two aspects of informants' adult lives: their careers and their families. Following this, four dimensions of identity are explored: metaphors, marginality, explanations and cultural membership. Each of these themes moves from the immediate experiences of these women and men to a broader discussion of Identity.

Identity is one of an array of interrelated concepts which we use to talk about our-selves. Mead (1934), Mauss

(1938), Goffman (1959) and others have distinguished those concepts like identity which are public, interactive presentations (along with role, individual, person, Mead's "me") from those which are private and uniquely personal (self, ego, psyche, Mead's "I"). Ethnic identity has been considered a special form of identity which is related to one's origins. Alba (1990) contends that ethnic identity is not merely a state of mind or self-presentation:

> As important, if not more so, are the behavioral and experiential expressions of identity, its crystallization into concrete patterns of action and relationship...If an ethnic identity has no <u>content</u>, no commitments in terms of action, then it represents a pure form of what Herbert Gans (1979) has called 'symbolic ethnicity,' a self-conscious attempt to 'feel ethnic,' to the exclusion of 'being ethnic' (pp. 75-76).

By diminishing the internal dimension of identity, Alba attempts to readjust a perceived imbalance in favor of concrete expressions of identity. Yet, on the basis of these informants' narratives, I would turn Alba's dualism on its head. Public "patterns of action and relationship" are <u>not</u> separate from how we think and feel about ourselves. Sapir (1917), Hallowell (1955) and other interactionists emphasize that we act on the basis of how we conceive our context and our world. Nor, as these informants have continually shown, is 'ethnic' identity merely some sort of hat worn for public display. Ethnic identity is part of overall identity which includes both public expressions as well as private notions of self.

The lives of these informants have challenged the apparently innate and inviolate features of Communication and Family. The discussions here now question theoretical and popular assumptions about the nature of identity. Who am I? The wisdom of biological, psychological and popular literature tells us we are the products of our parents. In exploring the essence of who we are, we must consider not only the relative nature of identity but why its very conceptualization has taken the particular form it has. We are defined not only by the answers we give but by the questions we ask.

Leaving Home

Although I made concerted efforts to include as wide a range of informants as possible, one feature occurred repeatedly. At the time of this study, 65 out of the 150 informants (43.3%) worked primarily with deaf children or adults. These occupations included interpreters, teachers, psychological counselors, administrators, vocational counselors, speech therapists, ministers and audiologists.[1] Twelve other informants including lawyers, insurance agents, priests, travel agents and physicians routinely saw deaf people as part of their general clientele. One informant explained:

> I didn't plan on it. They just started coming in. Probably word of mouth. And once one came in, that was all it took.

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[1] This includes 5 informants who were currently students in a degree or training program for one of these occupations.

In addition to the 77 informants mentioned, 9 men and women previously worked with the deaf. Another 5 currently did volunteer work with the deaf such as interpreting, coaching a sports team or serving as a phone relay operator. In total, nearly two-thirds (60.7%) of the informants in this study (91 out of 150) currently or previously worked in some capacity with deaf people.[2] Wilbur and Fristoe (1986) found an even high proportion of respondents in their study were in occupations related to deaf people: 69.9% used their sign skills on the job including 59.6% who worked primarily with deaf people.

Our occupations are one way we define who we are. Informants' narratives about their career choices reflected themes which had also been used to describe their childhood experiences as well as present adult identities. When I asked these men and women how they ended up working with the Deaf, informant after informant gave testimony to an often serendipitous turn of events. More than half of those currently working with the deaf described how they had initially been solicited by someone who knew their parents were deaf.

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[2] I have not included occupations that may be considered related to those described above such as counselor for persons with physical disabilities, interpreter in other languages or special education teacher. None of these worked with deaf individuals.

> I remember picking up the phone and this guy says, "Your mother and father are deaf, aren't they? Well, how'd you like to earn some money." At first I didn't know what he was talking about. I thought he was some kind of pervert. [Laughs.]

Several mentioned starting off in other careers and finding their sign language or knowledge of deaf people a more marketable skill. Although most informants found their jobs rewarding and providing a much needed resource to other deaf people, they frequently conveyed a sense of drifting into these careers.

> I don't know, it just happened. I didn't plan on it, but one thing led to the next and, well, I was making money for what I had done my whole life, so why not?

A similar sense of serendipitous fate was also used to describe how their parents became deaf (Chapter 3, 81-84) as well as how informants themselves accepted their unique family circumstances.

A second theme concerning occupational choices is the intensity of these family experiences and the continued sense of moral obligation. Although there were still a sizeable minority of informants who never worked with deaf people, many of these men and women spoke of resisting pressures (external and/or internal) to pursue a career related to deaf people. The majority of informants -- those who currently worked with deaf people as well as those who never had -- repeatedly used two phrases to describe their career options: "in deafness" or "not in deafness." During the interviews, several informants spoke of how they were currently re-evaluating their career decision: some who worked with the deaf wanted to "get out of deafness" while others who did not work with the deaf felt it might be time to do so. The strength of this dynamic can also be seen in informants' frequent use of the term 'abandon': "I felt like I was abandoning deafness when I changed jobs." While another informant countered:

> When I hear someone say, "Oh, you abandoned deaf people," it makes me angry. I didn't abandon deafness. I chose to go into something else.

A third theme concerns the inherent familiarity of these occupations. For many, their jobs were extensions of their family responsibilities. Although a few, like Keith, told me he could never imagine continuing doing this for a living, more often these jobs recreated aspects of cultural mediation from their childhood. Denise explained: "It's the one thing I feel I can do that makes me feel worthwhile." For many informants, such jobs represented not merely familiarity of specific tasks but a larger sense of belonging. Ella told me that "I get my strokes from deaf people -- not from hearing people." Dwight explained that working with deaf people "was comfortable, like being home." Because most informants no longer lived within a deaf family, careers were one way of continuing their cultural heritage.

Apart from the explicit mention of their occupations, the narratives of informants who worked with the Deaf were generally distinguishable from those who did not. These informants' narratives often reflected the vocabulary and the conceptualizations of their professional backgrounds -- whether in their linguistic descriptions of particular forms and uses of sign language ("Sim-com," "code-switching," "Cued versus SEE") or in their assessment and opinions on such topics as the Deaf power movement, trends in educational policies and current legislation. Many of these men and women felt their training and their careers offered them ways to talk about their family experiences. Richard told me:

> Until I started [a degree program], I didn't have much perspective or understandings about deaf people -- or even my own life.

Yet, a number of other informants questioned whether these interpretations clarified or pathologized their family experiences. This was particularly true among those informants who were interpreters and teachers of the deaf. Inez recalled her interpreter training program:

> Oh, you go in thinking you have a lot of experience. And then they tell you, "That's not the way you're supposed to do it. You're doing it all wrong." [Inez then demonstrated "correct" ways of interpreting.] And before long, you feel like, God, my family was really fucked up!

Yvonne explained how much a Deaf education program had altered her understanding of her own family:

> When I was growing up, our lives were comfortable. Normal. I wanted to date deaf guys, even thought I might marry a deaf man. Then I went to college. That was a real jolt for me. I learned more about hearing people and their ways, their customs. I went into deaf education and studied all about deafness. I learned all the negative things that deafness is. How it is isolating and cuts a person off from society. I learned about reading levels and achievement tests. I just kept absorbing all these negative ideas.

In explaining why he stopped being a teacher for the deaf, Phil wondered, "How come they can't accept that these kids are deaf and that there's nothing wrong with them?" A number of informants confided that they often used their family experiences as their primary guide, frequently disregarding professionally endorsed methods and explanations.

In my library research, I could find no other population with such a high degree of correlation between their childhood family life and present adult career. Although sampling bias is possible, informants themselves confirmed a similarly high incidence among other siblings, childhood acquaintances and friends who were not interviewed for this study. Among these informants, the apparently high incidence of occupations related to deaf people suggests that earlier family adaptations may translate into life-patterns. Indeed, many informants felt their careers were the inevitable result of their earlier family experiences. Whiting and Whiting's 1975 cross-cultural study showed that it was child's early environment which demonstrated the greatest socializing influence. Although their observations did not consider the correlation between childhood environment and adult occupational choices, the present study indicates directions for future research. Rather than a more literal comparison with a parent's occupation, careers could be considered more broadly as a way of recreating and maintaining familiar childhood environments.

Another Family

These one hundred and fifty men and women were not just the children of their deaf parents. They were often parents themselves -- and wives, lovers, husbands and grandparents. These second families were almost exclusively hearing. Most informants had neither deaf spouses (see Chapter 2, pp. 70 ff.) nor deaf children (Chapter 8, pp. 248 ff.). If informants learned the shape and meaning of Family from their unique childhood experiences, how were these re-created families affected?

Over half of these men and women spoke of a greater sense of their distinct childhoods within the context of their new families. Many, like Ruby and Catherine, described a process of self-recognition:

> [Ruby:] I remember the first time Tony's [her husband's] family came to dinner. It wasn't like anything I had ever seen before. Not just the talking, I mean the way they acted, stiff, polite, and careful and all that. And, you know, [signs, "Vague."] At first I thought it was just because it was the first time. But, that was twenty years ago and they're still like that. Now I see that they're just acting like hearing people. [Laughs.]

> [Catherine:] When Sharon [her first child] was born, it was like, every little thing made me wonder. How did my mom and dad raise me? How did they know if I was crying in the next room? How did I learn to talk?

Other informants remembered being told by their spouses, their children or their in-laws that there was something different about them. Stella recalled one time when her husband and daughter tried to explain it to her:

> My daughter started, "Mom, it's like you do things different, you react different, sometimes you're just weird." And I looked at my husband and he says, "Well, I guess I'm used to it, but I sure remember thinking when I first saw you with your parents that this really was pretty weird."

The previous discussions of communication styles and methods as well as family dynamics and patterns indicate that there might, indeed, be differences among those who grew up with deaf parents. And, as Stella's example indicates, these differences were often perceived as inferior or abnormal when compared to hearing family norms.

Many women and men spoke of the extra burden of interpreting or explaining whenever their old and new families converged. As in the previous discussion of family gatherings (Chapter 3, pp. 90-99), the cultural differences between their two families often created misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Art expressed the strain of trying to balance two families, two world views:

> My wife would say I was strange and different and she didn't understand me. I'll give an example. My father would be at the house and sometimes he'd get angry with my son [signs and pantomimes very deaf angry expressions]. And my dad isn't really that angry. I grew up with this. This is how he expresses his anger. It's cultural. But my wife, she sits there and says, "Your dad is being awfully upset. What's the matter with him?" And then she starts on me, "Everything's for your dad. Everything has to fit to your dad. And why can't he change? Why can't he modify to fit to our hearing world? " And the next thing I'm into an argument trying to explain it. And all the while Dad doesn't understand what we're arguing about. He starts signing to me, [signs, "What the hell is wrong with her?"] And she's saying, "What the hell is wrong with him?" And I'm caught in the middle again.

Neither Art's hearing wife nor his hearing son could communicate with his deaf father. A few informants felt fortunate that their spouses or children learned sign language or actively communicated with their parents. Generally, however, even among informants who were fluent in sign language, most spouses and children had difficulty communicating with informants' parents. This was not explained by a lack of contact between these family members; deaf parents were often a daily or weekly presence in the lives of informants. Many informants felt their childhood role as interpreter just continued into their adult lives as well. A few, like Deborah, had reached an impasse:

> I'd just had it. I was tired of having to sign everything for them. Back and forth, back and forth. I just left them [parents, husband and four children] together for a whole weekend. And, I told them, if you want to talk to each other, then you do it. I've had it!

Although her absence promoted some direct communication between her deaf and hearing family members, Deborah confessed that the interactions were generally brief and superficial at best. Several informants felt the social pressure to conform to spoken English had continued to its logical conclusion: the hearing grandchildren would show no trace of their deaf grandparents' language.

As informants discussed their childhood and present families, one striking feature was how frequently informants remained involved with their families of origin. Compared to most other informants, Claire was adamantly outspoken about her feelings:

> Oh, I told him [husband] right off the bat! Don't you ever come between me and my parents. As long as we keep that straight, there won't be any problems!

Although less explicit, a similar perspective runs through many other informants' narratives as well.

> Evelyn [his wife] is really understanding about it all. She just understands that my parents need me to do some things, and that I have to go over there [parents' house] and take care of things...It's not like a competition or anything, it's just the way it is.

Such loyalty and interdependence runs counter to the dominant cultural pattern of separating from your birth family. For several informants, this continued responsibility was accepted begrudgingly.

> I show up at the door and they [parents] hand me a pile of letters and bills and ask me to deal with it...not even a hello first.

Yet, most informants saw themselves as their parents' main resource into the hearing world. Lola, an only child, described how she took her mother into her home rather than put her in a nursing home.

> Yes, of course it was hard. But there weren't any other options. When they wanted to put my mother in a nursing home, I couldn't let them do that. I couldn't. A deaf woman with no one to talk to, no one to understand her. You just have to do what you have to do...there's no one else.

Like many other ethnic groups, these hearing children of deaf parents were part of an on-going extended family. One critical difference, as a number of informants pointed out, is that they were often identified with the majority culture. Ralph commented on his public and private discrepancies:

> If I was Black or Italian or something, people might understand. They might say, Oh, your family is different because that's a different culture. But, when they look at me, they just see this white guy who is too involved with his family. It doesn't compute.

The appearance of such a relationship flirted with the illusion of their parents' dependency, a stigmatizing image most informants decidedly wanted to avoid.

Metaphors of Identity

Discussions and explanations of identity are threaded throughout these narratives. Higgins (1980) proposes that "In developing a sense of who we are, we compare ourselves to some people and contrast ourselves to others. We use both similarities and differences in establishing our identities" (p. 176). Previous chapters have considered how informants' views of themselves are reflected in their narratives about family members as well as in childhood routines. This chapter now turns to a more immediate presentation of identity: How did these women and men see and describe themselves? Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose that "human thought processes are largely metaphorical" (p. 6). Each culture provides metaphors which explain events, processes and ourselves which otherwise may be confusing or contradictory. Informants' narratives not only emphasized their unique personal histories, but expressed metaphors of identity which draw from both the Deaf and Hearing worlds.

The most prominent and most frequently discussed feature of identity was being Deaf or Hearing. As these women and men repeatedly demonstrated, these qualities were not limited to functional conditions but encompassed a much broader spectrum of values and behaviors. One informant explained:

> When I'm sitting in a room or walking down the street, people look at me and they see this hearing person. That's all they see. But just beneath the surface, there's this deaf person. I'm not talking about hearing loss, I'm talking about a whole way of being. The real me is deaf. If you want to know me, you've got to know that part of me.

Without an appreciation of the cultural dimensions of deafness, such paradoxical remarks would be nonsensical. For many informants, identifying oneself as 'Deaf' and/or 'Hearing' was akin to 'coming out.' Gorman (1980) describes coming out as achieving "an acceptance which is a new perception of ones' self" (p. 6). For several informants, coming out meant seeing themselves as Hearing.

> A few years ago my [deaf] sister sat me down. She said, "You know, you're hearing." And I looked at her and shook my head. I said, [signs, "No, I'm the same as you, deaf."] She looked at me again and said, "You're hearing". And, I guess that was the first time I really got it. I <u>was</u> hearing.

For many others, being Deaf was a reclamation of an important part of their history and identity:

> ["Do you feel that you're being pushed out of Deaf culture?"] Ten years ago I think that deaf people tried to push me out...But I got to the point where I started saying, Wait a minute! You can't get rid of your kids, and you can't get rid of people that are part of Deaf culture. We are as much a part of Deaf culture. We're not a hearing person coming in and telling you what to do. We're your kids! We grew up in the same household. You cannot deny me that.

Although being 'Deaf' or 'Hearing' suggests cultural allegiances and boundaries, they were also ways of talking about oneself and differentiating oneself from one group or another. In this respect, informants' blatantly paradoxical identity -- being deaf while being hearing -- underscores the diversity and the contradictions possible among any group of individuals who are summarily viewed as a monolithic cultural whole.

A second metaphor of identity recalls a childhood of versatility and malleability. For Jim, this facet of his past expressed a present sense of unfocused identity:

> I'm constantly looking at my face in the mirror and [signs 'I don't know. I don't know.']...As a boy, I felt like a chameleon. Just adapted to every situation, I could be any role. And I was in that role -- at least for a while. I was my mother when I had to interpret for her, I was my father when had to interpret for him. I was the mechanic, the preacher, the car salesman. I assumed the personality of whoever was speaking. I was that person. I was the perfect child, I was whatever anybody thought you should be. I fit into that mold like a chameleon.

Using the identical image, Maureen's explanation took an entirely different turn:

> I was a chameleon. I learned it as a kid. Doing different things, being different things. I do it now. You can change your hair, you can change your clothes, you can go see what's going on. One night I could go into a French restaurant with somebody, then the next night I could go into a health food restaurant in another part of town, and then I could go to Chinatown. And I did. ["Did you ever feel like you didn't know who you were?"] Oh no. I'm not the kind of person that's easily affected and swayed by people. I've always had that inner strength where I know who I am. On the outside I changed so I could be invisible, but not my character. I kept my mouth shut because then I could get in and see what things were really like. I could physically go places where they wouldn't really know I was there. I was learning and watching.

These two informants different uses of the same metaphor illustrates an important point. In re-telling who we are, we borrow from our past -- but we explain from our present. Jim and Maureen's image of 'chameleon' is rooted in similar childhood experiences, one which captures the sense of changing roles that many other informants have also described. Yet, Jim and Maureen's explanations are different -- not only because their actual experience may have been different, but because their present sense of themselves is different.

A third group of metaphors recalls the role of bridging the gap between deaf and hearing people. In describing themselves and their responsibilities, informants frequently used metaphors which evoked their special capacity to provide their parents and hearing people with glimpses of each other's world: "the conduit", "the link", "the medium", "the bridge," "the go-between." These metaphors were routinely preceded by the definite article ('the') rather than the indefinite ('a'). This usage reiterates most informants' sense of their role as unique: "I was <u>the</u> bridge between my parents and the Hearing world." Narratives explaining this aspect of identity were often overlaid with a strong sense of moral obligation.

> If I didn't link them up, who would do it? ["Did you ever think about not doing it?"] Sure, sure I thought about it, but, I couldn't. I had to do it. Who else would do it?

Many informants took pride in their abilities to perform this service, and often suggested that these skills carried over to such adult tasks as conciliation and negotiation -- in personal relationships as well as in the workplace.

Several informants felt the role of connecting the Deaf and Hearing worlds robbed them of a separate identity. Martha remembered one incident which dramatized this:

> I was asked to draw a picture of myself once, my body and how I saw myself. I started drawing my parents on one side, and then these hearing people on the other. But, I didn't know what I looked like. I couldn't do it. I could draw anybody else in my family, but not me [her voice fades]...

The fourth metaphor of identity touches upon the previous three: a space between two worlds. For some, it expressed the limbo of being between the Deaf and Hearing worlds; for others, the constant shifting of interpreting and mediating roles.

> It's like you live in this mirror world, you reflect what they say, But where are you? Where am I? I live in the mirror, I'm only a reflection.

These metaphors of fused and amorphous identities are based on an ideal of separateness and distinctness. Yet, this perspective reflects biases of the Hearing culture and contemporary American culture: one which values individualism, and which envisions Identity as a separate and objectively defined phenomenon.[3] Such notions of identity conflict with cultures which value interdependence in which one's identity is part of an overall relationship to others. Hsu (1972) writes that "The Chinese and Japanese have stronger ties with

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[3] Levine (1985) proposes a major characteristic of contemporary America is its inflexibility and uncomfortableness with ambiguity.

their families and wider kin groups than do the Jews, and are, therefore, less self-reliant and less free but more protected from the uncertainty of identity" (p. 390). The space between the Deaf and Hearing worlds becomes a particularly important metaphor for many informants. It expresses the conflicting perspectives and values which contribute to feelings of individual and cultural marginality. It also suggests a compelling predisposition to seek out ways of resolving this marginalization.

Culture and Marginality

Sapir (1924) wrote that "the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (p. 402). Whorf (1956) continued the argument that language is an indicator and shaper of thought. Although critics have downplayed the Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis, their dismissal rests on what is presumed to be an overly deterministic relationship between language and thought. Yet, Sapir and Whorf were concerned with habitual patterns which organize thought and influence behaviors -- not invariable absolutes which constrain all thought. Looking beyond the implications of grammatical and semantic categorizations, language remains a powerful reflection of culture. It is, perhaps, among the Deaf that language and culture achieve an unparalleled relationship. Within Deaf culture, language is the integral feature: both its soul and its demon, both the barrier to and the means of social interaction.

The paradoxical relationship with language is an important dynamic among deaf people. In reviewing some of the myths and stories within Deaf culture, Padden and Humphries (1988) observe:

> What we see in all these texts is the formulation and expression of ideas that Deaf people hold to be true and immutable. The ingredients for achieving the desirable world are the same: signed language and the shared knowledge of Deaf people, or what Veditz calls 'their thoughts and souls, their feelings, desires, and needs' (p. 37).

Despite the centrality of sign language -- as an expression of self and a means of interaction -- this soul of Deaf culture has repeatedly been opposed and colonialized by the Hearing world. Such oppression has ironically enhanced Deaf culture. Blauner (1972) suggests that racism is the "single most important source of the developing ethnic peoplehood" (p. 140). As deaf people struggle to preserve their language and their world, they bring their index finger to their lips and point out their oppressor's idiosyncracy: They are hearing, they are different than us, they do not understand.[4] Within the Deaf community, the critical measure of cultural identity is neither degree of language proficiency nor shade

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[4] The most common sign for 'hearing' is an index finger placed horizontally against the lips; the index finger then makes a small outward circle. The speaker's accompanying facial gestures and style of hand movement can convey a range of connotations from a matter-of-fact description to one of indignation.

of skin color nor knowledge of customs. It ultimately depends neither on declarations of allegiance nor degree of interaction. Above all, to be deaf is to not be hearing.[5]

This oppositional paradigm underscores why parental linkage is so crucial for hearing children of deaf parents. Because they share neither their parents' functional hearing loss nor, in many cases, their parents' language, the primary source of cultural identity and community entree is their connection through their parents. Only by association do hearing children have access to this exclusive identity and this community: Mother Father Deaf. The experience of deafness has come full circle. Now, to be hearing is to be shut out.

As the centers of these two worlds become more sharply defined, a paradox of identity emerges for these informants: those who are deaf remain on the periphery of the Hearing world; those who are hearing remain on the margins of the Deaf world. Caught between these conflicting worlds, many informants potentially become part of people without culture.[6] Throughout history, groups of people have been

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[5] Padden and Humphries (1988) make a strong case for this in Voices from a Culture.

[6] Although I have borrowed "people without culture" from Rosaldo (1988), I use the term differently. Rosaldo used the term ironically to point out the flaw in presuming that we are people without culture because only "others" have culture because only they are different. I use the term more literally: people who are separated from or disenfranchised from their own cultural heritage.

separated off from the dominant culture by birthright, geographic boundaries, racial features and occupational differences: Untouchables (India), Cagots (France and Spain), Solubba (Arabia), potters (Africa), Kauwa (Hawaiian islands). These people remain on the periphery, unable to achieve the status, power and visibility which insures membership in the dominant culture. Park (1950) describes the marginal man: "The stranger stays, but he is not settled. He is a potential wanderer. That means that he is not bound as others are by the local proprieties and conventions" (p. 351).

Bilinguals present a special case of marginality. Although they can often pass within one language group or another, bilinguals remain partially anchored outside the group. Grosjean (1982) emphasizes that the history of lingustic usage and interaction among bilinguals is a critical determinant of language choice. Grosjean cites children of immigrant families who continue speaking the minority language with their parents and grandparents despite knowing the majority language much better. The potentially expansive and harmonious aspects of bilingualism are often undermined by the history of conflict between the two language groups. Indeed, many informants spoke of how they associated certain roles and resumed certain feelings when they spoke in sign language. Such splitting may account for why some researchers were unable to find significant differences since studies were conducted using only the spoken word. MacLaughlin (1978) thinks the character of the marginal man is overdrawn with respect to bilinguals. However, MacLaughlin's assertion relies upon research which found that many bilinguals have formed their own community: "Many people in contact with two cultures may at first seek to belong solely to one or the other, but with time they realize that they are most at ease with people who share their bicultural experience" (p. 28). Although an organization like CODA offers members a bicultural respite, it is usually a temporary solution within a world largely defined either as Deaf or Hearing.

One phenomenon which arose towards the end of my research was 'coda-talk.'[7] Coda-talk referred to a highly creative combination of ASL and spoken language which was both voiced and signed. Coda-talk was limited to a handful of informants and members of CODA, and almost always used privately among hearing children of deaf parents. Rachel's father had been recently hospitalized in another state. As Rachel retold the story of her father's illness to a small group of other adult hearing children of deaf parents, the carefully crafted balance of shifting between two worlds crumbled under the strain of her mother's illness and the differing patterns of

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[7] Although 'coda-talk' takes its name from the organization CODA, its usage was not officially endorsed nor was it presently used by a majority of members.

response from the Deaf and Hearing worlds:[8]

> What must tell you, me find bad news. Father very sick, hospital, heart. Deaf part of me think deaf way. But me live in hearing world, have hearing roommates, have hearing friends. All act like hearing people. At my house, hearing house. Me sit by phone. Alone. What happen when me tell hearing roommates, they walk out of room. Me find out hearing people think, something happen, your private business. Not ask questions. Leave you alone. Think if you want talk, you talk they listen, but not ask questions. Me call hearing friends, please come over, need see you. One hearing friend say, busy, can't, but give phone support. Other hearing friend say, I have this block of time. Hearing time. This little block of time. Deaf way very different. Deaf come. In your face, ask ask ask. Want to know everything, A to Z. Important touch. We sit down. Discuss, group. Face to face...
>
> I say what is this hearing way? Stupid hearing people. I never hate hearing people so much in my whole life. That one week with hearing. All hearing friends mine. They nice people, but something going on. Conflict. Hearing way, deaf way different. I was so mad. At who? God? Deaf? Hearing? It awful situation. I say I'm leaving tomorrow, go visit deaf friends. I'm out of this hearing hell. I feel like I am in crazy world. Hearing way very different. I thought my goal to be hearing woman. Now, what? I have hearing life. Me sick of this shit. Hearing friends not know sign language, not know parents, not know nothing!

Although coda-talk alternately followed the grammatical and syntactic rules of both languages, there appeared to be a high degree of consistency among users. Coda-talk was seen by proponents as a way of expressing two conflicting linguistic heritages. Many other informants -- even those who were active participants in CODA -- were highly critical of coda-talk as "immature" or "a mockery of sign language." While

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[8] I have not included the many signs that Rachel also used while telling her story. Videotape would be a far more ideal way of presenting coda-talk as well as passages that were signed by other informants.

conceding that coda-talk reflected a certain sense of their own dual heritage, most informants felt that coda-talk was intensely private and personal, and public usage was tantamount to a betrayal of a family and cultural trust. Although coda-talk is not fully explored here, it is one way that some hearing children of deaf parents expressed the sense of duality and marginality experienced among most other informants.

Informants' strong disagreements over coda-talk reverberated among other topics as well such as ways of interpreting, educational methods and, ultimately, the overall interpretation of their family experience. A few informants tried to steer me towards or away from certain other hearing children of deaf parents, depending on whether these others would corroborate or invalidate their own perspectives. The strong emphasis on individualism in this country sets the stage for a tension between a pull to find others similar to yourself and wanting to be unique. Additionally, informants' cultural marginality is heightened by perspectives which are frequently circumscribed by their particular family histories. At varying points along the border between these two worlds, hearing children and deaf parents provide each other with a distinct vision of that other world. Stigma and oppression have frequently exacerbated the isolation and prevented a more fully realized shared culture. Yet, despite their disagreements over particulars, almost all informants described a sense of kinship among others like themselves.[9] Weber (1922) defines an ethnic group as one whose members

> entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration...it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists (p. 389).

As Dan walked down the sidewalk to meet me, he greeted me with an unmistakable affirmation of our common heritage, "I don't know you, but I know you."

The rift of language, of how we express ourselves, which parts of our bodies we can and cannot use -- our mouths, eyes, ears, or hands -- becomes a profound separation between worlds and between families. The more marginal, the more ambiguous, the more intangible one's position in the world is, the greater the need to attach themselves to something -- whether it be a belief system, an explanation, a group. People need to have meaning and reasons for why things are the way they are. This is how people make sense of their world. Because there is so much ambiguity in deafness, the search for explanations and membership are part of the culture of deafness. Separated from family and origins, a quest begins anew. Who am I? Who do I belong to?

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[9] Although I have not included this data within the present study, I did meet informally with adult hearing children of deaf parents from other countries (including Israel, Canada, Ireland, Australia, Argentina, England, Brazil and Finland.) In general, each adult felt that his or her family experiences were more like those of other hearing children of <u>deaf</u> parents (regardless of country of origin) than like those of peers with hearing parents from their own country.

Explanations

When I phoned Ellen the night before her interview, she gave me directions to her home and asked me what time I was planning to get up the next morning. Knowing it would take several hours to drive there, I told her my alarm was set for 5 a.m. Ellen laughed and then said,

> I know you're a child of deaf parents because, you know, deaf people get up early.

In fact, my parents do get up early -- but I had never considered this a cultural trait. Ellen later explained that her parents were raised in residential schools in which they always had to get up early and this life-long pattern shaped her own behavior. Ellen's observation came near the end of my fieldwork so I was unable to fully test out the accuracy of her generalization. (I did meet adult hearing children and/or deaf parents who did not get up early -- despite attending residential schools.) Although her generalization may have been flawed, what was striking about Ellen's remark was that, like most other informants, she regularly generated hypotheses about the impact of having deaf parents. Often, an informant broadened his or her hypotheses to include other hearing children of deaf parents as well.

During my months of fieldwork, informants offered me numerous hypotheses and explanations of their present adult life -- concerning certain behaviors, values, interests, ways of interacting...All these components of identity. Although this focus reflects my own research interests, the relationship between having deaf parents and present adult identity was a theme spontaneously generated throughout many informants' unstructured interviews. Why were explanations made at all? Like most other informants, David felt "It's got to mean something." When people are plagued by the need to have meaning and the need to have things make sense, Kleinman (1988) suggests that there is a comfort in explanatory models -- even those that are negative. Explanations make people feel better. The heightened sense of marginality among many of these informants may accentuate the need to seek out explanations of their ambiguous and paradoxical experiences. Park (1950) suggests that marginal people are especially attracted to membership in ideological groups. Laura half-kiddingly confided:

> Sometimes I wish someone would just hand me a list that says, Here is what having deaf parents means. This, this, this. I'm tired of trying to figure it out.

Each of these 150 men and women used particular terms, concepts and analogies to explain their experiences -- explanations which helped them tell their story. So often after an interview I felt that this particular informant's explanation made sense to me. But, resolving ambiguity and paradox often results in a singular version of truth, an unconflicted world view which explains one's experiences. When I compared one informant's explanation with that of another informant, there were often contradictions. After an informant discussed his or her own interpretations, I would suggest those I heard from other men and women -- creating an opportunity for informants often isolated from each other to consider and critique these alternative perspectives. CODA also provided a forum for adult hearing children of deaf parents to exchange their family histories as well as their interpretations of these histories.

Although informants differed in many of the specifics of their family histories as well as the context of their present adult lives, three overall explanatory models[10] emerged.

1. The Medical Model is centered on the biomedical causes and treatment of deafness. Medical explanations were sometimes pragmatic ("All I know is being deaf means you can't hear") and sometimes profoundly pathologizing ("That being deaf was like being sick your whole life").

2. The Psychological Model stresses psychological outcomes of deafness for deaf parents and their hearing children. Such explanations frequently reflected the popular literature on adult children. Among informants, the two most frequently used analogies were children of alcoholics and adult children from dysfunctional families.

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[10] 'Explanatory model' refers to an organizing pattern of assumptions which (loosely or rigidly) structures ideas, perceptions and understandings.

> 3. <u>The Cultural Model</u> proposes a cultural framework to explain differences in behaviors and world views. Informants using this approach often suggested comparisons with other minority groups and children of immigrants.

Individual informant's analogies and explanations usually did not conform to a single model. More typically, each informant fashioned an amalgam of explanations out of two or all three perspectives. Although I have endorsed a cultural view of Deaf people within this dissertation, informants' cultural explanations are treated here as one possible model. There are a few points of clarification. First, not all informants were equally exposed to or part of Deaf culture, nor do I suggest that cultural explanations supercede all others. Secondly, the meaning of 'culture' varied among informants and this affected how cultural explanations were used. Finally, because most informants did not have opportunities to test out their cultural hypotheses, some informants' proposed cultural explanations (i.e., getting up early, eating left-handed, being fluent in sign language) were not actually shared among the larger sample of informants.

The excuse... the opportunity... the challenge... the defect. Informants weighed all that happened and did not happen because of their parents' deafness. They considered positive and negative outcomes. Whether their quest was life-long or time-limited, informants were strongly opinionated on the meaning and outcomes of having deaf parents. In considering these three explanatory models, I am less concerned with critiquing each model than considering how informants used these models to describe their experiences. Generally, the medical model was acceptable only as a way to describe a functional condition: being deaf meant you could not hear. As discussed in Chapter 2, most informants felt that attempts to correct deaf people -- whether through such methods as speech therapy or cochlear implants -- set a dangerous, near genocidal tone. Della explained her disdain for such explanations:

> It's this medical idea of deficit. That deaf people are broken, that we hearing children of deaf parents are broken. That somehow there is something broken, there is something deficient that needs to get fixed.

Among these men and women there was considerable dissension over the expected social and psychological outcomes of not being able to hear. Most informants felt that perceived handicaps were socially created.

> It's only because people think you have to talk that deaf people aren't normal. When everybody's standing around a jet engine, who can talk, who can hear?

Only a few felt that not being able to hear was intrinsically disabling. Yet most informants acknowledged that in a less than ideal world, there were still consequences of being deaf -- for their parents and for themselves. Informants often proposed analogies to their experiences: children of alcoholics, children of immigrants, children of holocaust survivors, minority groups including non-English speaking people, women and gays. Psychological explanations vied with cultural interpretations -- among informants as a group as well as within individuals. Although Richard and Hannah never met, they argued against each other's explanations. Richard felt that the Adult Children literature helped him understand his own family experiences:

> When I thought about being in a dysfunctional family, I tried to understand and to match up. I don't like the term but it helped me to understand my own family. In alcoholic families, the kids are the ones who have to cover up for their alcoholic parents, to keep everything hidden away, not let the outside world see. They have to kind of take responsibility, adult responsibilities for their family's functioning. And it seems to me that's true for a lot of hearing kids with deaf parents. Not necessarily that we're covering up but you were helping your deaf parents function in the hearing world. And that's a terrible responsibility to put on kids. And as result, we take on this responsibility to fix everything, to be the one who handles everything, and we take responsibility beyond our years.

Hannah felt the analogy with children of alcoholics was overdrawn:

> I really resent being compared to the alcoholic. I think there are more differences than there are similarities. The symptom may be the same, but the cause is something different. In an alcoholic family a person is covering up an illness, covering up for whatever bad things happened in that family. They cover up for something that's really bad. Whereas with our kind we're fixing things, we're cultural mediators here. If we're covering over something or trying to help with something, it's like because they're cultural differences. And that's not something bad. But we're functioning the same way. We are given more responsibilities. So the symptoms may be the same, but just because you have a runny nose doesn't mean you have pneumonia.

As they considered various analogies and explanations, informants often commented on their own multiple perspectives. Phil felt his dual heritage provided access to two world views.

> We can see both sides because we're on both sides. A lot of issues can get very confusing. There are all these issues that get very intermingled....It's just a matter of continuing to sift and sift and sift and see which seem to apply.

Edith described herself as shifting perspectives according to her own life events:

> I think my own perspective changes almost with the weather. Sometimes I feel as though some of the roots of my difficulties are pathological and sometimes I feel as though they are cultural. And when things are going smoothly and things are going well and I'm feeling a lot stronger and stable it becomes more 'culturicized.' And when I feel that I can't get to the root of the situation I tend to ask then what's wrong with this. Then I flip over to the other side. I don't know that it's either-or, black or white.

Phil and Edith's descriptions echo the chameleon-like metaphors of identity described earlier. Both narratives indicate their relative comfort with dual or multiple perspectives. Al's response, however, recalls a different metaphor: the faceless limbo between world views.

> It seems to me that part of the problem we have is that we have too many different perspectives. Sometimes I feel blessed because I can see so many points of view. But, sometimes I feel cursed because I never know my own.

In their search to find the right balance of explanations, informants more often borrowed analogies and terms from either medically-oriented or psychologically-oriented models than cultural ones.

> Those children that are involved with alcoholic situations in their homes are more or less a victim of the situation. And I don't think that we are victims of the situation. People with alcohol are a whole different thing because alcoholism is a disease and the family members are victims. Deafness is <u>not</u> a disease.

Yet, explaining family phenomena through medical or psychological explanatory models reinforces an aberrant perspective of deafness. Even while using pathologically-oriented models, informants frequently strained out pathological implications.

> Somebody said I was being co-dependent, and I said "enabling." He said, "Well it's really the same thing." Well, it's not the same thing! You can call my family dysfunctional because we weren't like other families. But, that's not dysfunctional, that's just being different. We functioned better than most families.

Another informant:

> Well, the alcoholic thing doesn't play well for me and I think it doesn't play well for a lot of people. And some make comparisons with children of immigrants or holocaust survivors. Maybe that's a more accurate parallel because we're dealing with children of people who have been oppressed and had to fight to survive no matter what kind of cultural background. And there are a lot of parallels that those children have that really mirror the type of things that we deal with.

Although almost all informants acknowledged some sense of a Deaf culture, informants were generally more tentative and less precise when they used cultural explanations.

> ["So, what do you think Deaf Culture is?"] Well, you tell me, you're the anthropologist! [Laughs.]

Another informant:

> Yes, I believe there <u>is</u> a Deaf culture. ["What is Deaf culture?"] [Long pause.] Well, I don't know. It's hard to explain. ["Can you give me an example?"] Well, it's like the way we did things. ["Like what?"] Oh, I don't know, everything!

Despite the fact that most informants felt a cultural model was less pathologizing and preferable, the use of non-cultural explanations continued to dominate their narratives. This trend has significant implications for the individual and collective identities of these informants. And, as will be discussed in the next section, this propensity reflects a much broader cultural pattern of how we explain ourselves.

Joining the Culture

Almost all informants felt that having deaf parents was a major part of their history and, to varying degrees, their adult identity. As discussed, their interpretations often reflected the vernacular and analogies of psychological models. Why were some explanations more salient than others? What makes a 'good' explanation? Is it the way it resolves contradictions, the way it fits within a particular scheme, the values it espouses? A number of informants told me that, over the years, they had changed their minds about the impact of having deaf parents. Harold's remarks were typical: "If you had asked me just a couple of years ago, I would have said, What? Deaf parents? No big deal." Like many other informants, Harold now felt that having deaf parents was indeed a "big deal."

What was the source of this change? Harold explained his own rethinking by saying, "Well, after a divorce, after 40, you start looking at things differently." Like Harold, one of the most common reasons given was that some major life event -- a birth, a death, beginning or ending a relationship, or other personal crisis -- caused informants to reexamine their premises of self. Although these changes may reflect intrinsic developmental stages of separation and individuation such as those proposed by Erikson, the motivation to pursue self-exploration is also strongly endorsed within contemporary American culture. The search and the explanations of self become a highly viable form of dialogue within contemporary adult life. And, the overall shape of this quest is highly specific. Within a social context which values individual effort and objectivist definitions, the locus of explanations is sharply focused on the immediate environment of the family rather than larger social and cultural contexts. As the unquestioned source for our biological, social and psychological origins, The Family has become the ultimate arena for understanding ourselves and determining the origins of Life's dilemmas.

For most informants, having deaf parents was part of this developmental and social process of Identity. Nearly two-thirds of all individual informant's discussions about their identities and their parents fit an age-dependent pattern: younger informants were more matter-of-fact and less introspective; middle-aged informants tended to be more introspective and conflicted; and, finally, older informants were generally more resolved about previous identity and family issues. There were, however, many exceptions to this pattern. Marjorie, a 71 year old grandmother, told me:

> My whole life, mostly, people would ask me and I would tell them it didn't make any difference whatsoever. I wasn't lying. I just really felt that way. ["And now?"] Ha! Now I see it made all the difference in the world.

Jerry was a nineteen year old college sophomore:

> I don't understand how they [other adult hearing children of deaf parents] can think it was nothing. It's such a big part of my life! It's who I am.

Over one-fourth of these women and men were presently or had been in therapy, and most described how they discovered that they had ignored or denied issues and feelings around having deaf parents.

Changes in perspective on oneself and family were not always a function of age or life crises. A number of men and women felt increased public attention and the greater visibility of deaf people had generated their own interest in considering the impact of their Deaf heritage. Several informants felt that meeting with other hearing children of deaf parents, particularly those involved with CODA, had helped to redirect their focus.

> I thought I had dealt with a lot of it, but it wasn't until I was around other codas that something special happened. Because it is like deaf people who are isolated from each other, they end up pulling together. They have a different sense of who they are as a deaf person, and what deaf people can do. Somehow, for me, to be with other codas shifted and brought me in touch with things I never quite imagined were there.

Popular culture and the media also contributed to such reconsiderations. A number of informants cited current self-help books on adult children as well as Bradshaw's television series on dysfunctional families.[11]

Although self-explorations were usually not initially centered on having deaf parents, this feature unfolded as a routine part of remembering and analyzing childhood and family experiences. During this process, having deaf parents often became the issue.

> Oh, boy, do I remember. After a year or so, my therapist sitting there and saying, "Well, so you're finally gonna deal with having deaf parents. Now we're getting to the heart of the problem."

Whether in therapists' offices or in conversations with friends, in matching themselves against the paradigm of the Normal Family, these men and women often came up short. Cultural differences of the Deaf world became subsumed and reinterpreted according to the norms of the Hearing world. These men and women were still 'enmeshed' with their families, there were issues of dependency, communication was undoubtedly a major problem. Whittaker (1992) suggests that "The knowledge of self has spawned a form of cultural negotiator, commonly called professionals, whose business it is to socialize, correct socialization, and resocialize persons into

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[11] During the past few years, John Bradshaw has had several series on Public Television concerning 'dysfunctional' families -- a general characteristic he feels applies to most contemporary American families. Using a populist forum and simplified psychological explanations, Bradshaw focuses on the experiences and the ways of dealing with having been raised in a dysfunctional family. In addition to his television broadcasts, Bradshaw has also given lectures across the country as well as published several books.

appropriate understandings and knowledge about oneself" (p. 196).

Some men and women felt that only within the security of others like themselves could they openly explore their heritage and their identities. A number of informants felt CODA provided such a forum. Nick talked about attending a CODA conference.

> I went to one [CODA] conference and there was this speaker who talked about how adolescents and parents sort things out. Even kids with hearing parents. And, see, I didn't know a lot of that stuff! I didn't know that! I thought it was the deafness. I blamed everything on the deafness. I didn't know that! My father would say, "You think just because I'm deaf that I'm nothing, that you're better than me?" But now I see hearing parents do the same thing, say, "Listen, you don't think your family is worth anything?" It's the same thing. It's just that this is how hearing parents say it, this is how deaf people say it. It was like, Oh, now I get it! Parents, apron strings, all that. It happens in all families!

Nick found CODA helpful in understanding how his deaf parents were fundamentally like hearing parents, and how they expressed themselves differently. Others, however, were skeptical of CODA, feeling that too often it mirrored groups which were more pathological in nature.

> It seems like CODA has adopted a lot of ideas from Adult Children of Alcoholics. Maybe it's a first step, but I'm not sure it's the right step. Not that there aren't things in there that aren't helpful to us. But there are other alternatives that also can explain us. Like Children of holocaust survivors. Children of immigrants. And I think if you look hard at both of those populations we can see lots of parallels and maybe see different goals. And, it says something about how we see ourselves. We've had unique experiences, and maybe some of them <u>were</u> painful. But, why were they painful? Is the source some cultural or social problem that we have in the world in terms of accepting differences?

Finding the right analogies and explanations were only part of the struggle for those within and those outside CODA. Identifying oneself as a member of a group with a shared history and values also touched on conflicting cultural values: whether to be oriented toward the group or toward the individual. Most informants had experienced both perspectives: Deaf parents who often found security, understanding and a strengthened identity within a community of others like themselves; a Hearing world which stressed individualism, autonomy and the apparent loss of identity for those who are interdependent. Among those who participated in CODA, many of these informants used terms which recalled previous descriptions of the Deaf club: "I feel safe there." "I can be myself there." "I don't have to interpret for anyone." (See the section on the Deaf Club, Chapter 4, pp. 116-122). Others, like Pam, told me "Oh, I don't really need CODA right now. I've figured it out on my own." Harry's dilemma expresses this conflict between group support and autonomy.

> Yes, CODA is helpful. I feel like these are people who really understand me. When I'm there, I don't feel judged because my parents are deaf. Everyone's parents are deaf... But, you know, it's an artificial world. They don't allow outsiders in, you know, deaf people or hearing people who don't have deaf parents. There might be too much misunderstanding. And, sure I understand, there probably would be misunderstandings. But, CODA is this moment frozen in time, between worlds. There's a real world out there, with deaf people and hearing people. We can't keep ourselves shut off forever. We might feel like we would like to, but... ["But, what?"] But, at some point, I've got to figure it out for myself, in my own way.

The various ways of describing and explaining their lives posed a significant dilemma for these women and men. By espousing more broadly recognizable interpretations of family and self, they joined the mainstream culture whose norms often condemned their deaf family way of life. By aligning themselves with their deaf parents, they remained members of a marginalized culture in which their own status was ambiguous and paradoxical. In describing post-Hiroshima survivors, Lifton (1970) observes:

> I found that these survivors both felt themselves in need of special help, and resented whatever help was offered to them because they equated it with weakness and inferiority...I found that this equation of nurturance with a threat to autonomy was a major theme of contemporary life (p. 327).

For many informants, the uncertainties of membership in the Deaf world were often far preferable to a life of isolation and hollow individualism within the dominant Hearing culture. Bellah and colleagues (1985) suggest that the moral diffusion which stems from American individualism can be countered by collective memories such as ethnicity. Most informants continued to acknowledge and assert their cultural ties to the Deaf world. Helen's perspective corroborates this continued sense of connection:

> Deafness is our lifeline. You know, when you're born, they cut the umbilical cord and you're a separate person. Well, with deafness you can never cut the umbilical cord. Those of us who were raised in it, we can never leave it behind.

Chapter 10: Reprise

Our identities evolve from both similarities to and differences from others. Such distinctions emerge within historical, social and cultural contexts which determine not only the significance of particular features but overall patterns of response: to assert our uniqueness or to emphasize our shared sense of purpose and being. Same, or different? Are you hearing? Or, are you deaf? Most of these informants faced a paradox of identity: wanting to be the same as their parents and wanting to be different from them. Wanting to be like hearing people and not wanting to be like hearing people. Perin (1988) observes that "The stranger is the universal crosser of lines...the stranger is whomever we cannot place within our accustomed order" (p. 28). Without hesitation, Emily responded:

> Do I ever feel deaf? Yes. There is a deaf woman in me. And sometimes I'm very sad for her. I love it when just gets to be, when she can be present without me being conscious of her. Like when I get together with my deaf friends. When we're together, then that deaf part of me comes out. People always tell me, You sign like you're deaf. Well, I was, I am deaf. I was in another lifetime until I was told it wasn't nice for a hearing person to play deaf. But I wasn't playing. I really was. I really am deaf.

Hearing children of deaf parents appear to be people without culture -- straddling a land in between the Deaf and the Hearing. Their family experiences include both the normalcy of deafness and the normalcy of hearing. The stigma of deafness and the tyranny of hearing. Yet, their dilemma of identity also illustrates the fallacy of cultural dichotomization: You must be Deaf, or You must be Hearing. As one informant told me:

> I'm not deaf, but I'm not hearing. [Signs, I don't know, I'm not deaf or hearing. Both, I guess.]

Braroe (1975) suggests that "To be 'between two worlds' forces individuals into conflicts of choice and produces casualties among those who cannot embrace either the old or the new ways exclusively" (pp. 7-8). These informants' narratives have highlighted a prevailing American ethos, a "flight from ambiguity" as Levine (1985) describes it. Security in categorization, uniformity and dichotomization characterizes both Hearing <u>and</u> Deaf cultures.

Even anthropologists have fallen prey to this worldview. The myriad relationships between people with apparent differences and those "others" around them embody a search which has remained fundamental and yet elusive within anthropology: understanding "the other." Can a better understanding of this distant other ultimately provide a better understanding of ourselves? Yet, culture, too, is not a category but a continuum. Not a dichotomization between ourselves and that infamous Other, but a dialectic between self and group. Hearing children of deaf parents are not merely on the margin of one culture or the other. They are also at the center. This is the paradox not merely of these informants' lives, but of that enigmatic framework we call 'culture.' We are different <u>and</u> we are also the same. It is the paradox not merely of their lives, but of culture. We are not deaf. We are not hearing. We are neither deaf nor hearing. We are both deaf and hearing.

Hearing children of deaf parents move the schism between those who are different and those who are not to its ultimate setting. Here, the confrontation and the dialogue is not between those separated by geographic boundaries or political allegiances, between parent and child, or between Deaf and Hearing. Here, the drama of belonging and of being different unfolds within oneself. It is a reminder that we must understand not merely the contents and meanings of each side of the equation. We must understand that the dichotomy itself is a social creation. All along, as Robert Murphy (1990) eloquently recognized, this so-different so-distant "other" has included ourselves as well.

Now, instead of being interpreters between the Deaf and the Hearing, we speak with blended and broken voices. Neither completely deaf nor completely hearing, neither exclusively in sign nor exclusively in spoken words. We speak to hearing parents and hearing educators who never fully understood or accepted deafness, to deaf parents who were shut out of a Hearing world and learned to reject and mistrust hearing ways, and to the vast majority of others who may learn from our struggles at finding out who we are.

Epilogue

When my mother was two years old the babysitter forgot to strap her into the baby carriage. My mother fell out, hitting her head on the sidewalk. The concussion broke both her ear drums and she lost her hearing. My mother jokes that maybe the fall caused her to lose a little sense as well. My grandparents took her to specialists all over the country, but it was no use. Their only child, perfect in every way, was changed forever.

My mother would tell me the story of the time she was pregnant with me. My grandmother had discouraged her from having children. When my mother became pregnant, my grandmother even suggested having an abortion. My mother wasn't sure why her mother was so adamant. Maybe my grandmother thought a deaf woman would have a hard time raising a child. Maybe, because my mother was an only child, my grandmother thought her daughter wouldn't hold up under the drugeries of motherhood. Yet, from the day I was born my grandmother doted on me. My mother figured that my grandmother's sudden change of heart had something to do with mellowing out.

Within the past few years, my mother discovered that she had an older deaf aunt and a younger deaf cousin. Three generations of deaf relatives who had never met. Each of their families had kept them secret from each other. It now appears more than likely that my mother was born deaf. The story about falling out of the baby carriage probably wasn't true at all.

Had my grandparents actually known their daughter was born deaf? It's hard to know for sure. Both of my grandparents are long dead. It's a piece of family history that leads to a dead end. Sometimes I wonder if my grandmother worried that if my mother had a deaf child, the family secret would have been discovered. I don't know if my grandmother knew it as a statistical risk. Not measured in numbers. Only in fear. When I was little, I remember my grandmother telling me how proud and how happy my grandfather would be if he were only alive to see me. Now I wonder if somehow she meant something more than nostalgia for her dead husband. Maybe it was because I turned out hearing. A generation later, had I been born deaf the truth would have unmasked a lifetime of secrets.

When I was growing up in rural Illinois, my grandmother would visit us almost every weekend. She slept on a cot in my room. Sometimes there would be a bond between us as we both huddled in the darkness, in the silence made into a family. We would both listen to the noises of the clock in the living room or the wind outside. What she never knew was that although we were both hearing, the sounds in the night were different for each of us. She had come before the deafness. I had come after it.

GLOSSARY[*]

ASL: The commonly used acronym for American Sign Language.

American Sign Language (ASL or Ameslan): The native language of most life-long deaf people in the United States. O'Rourke and colleagues (1975) estimated that approximately 500,000 deaf people and an unknown number of hearing people use ASL in this country. Following Spanish, ASL is thought to be the second most frequently used non-English language in the U.S. ASL is not a visual representation of spoken English nor a way of pantomiming using gestures. ASL has distinct structural and morphological characteristics like other languages. ASL has an historical association with French Sign Language going back to the mid-Eighteenth Century, but Woodward (1978) and others argue that ASL developed naturally on its own and merely absorbed some French signs. For a more detailed description and history of ASL, consult Wilbur (1979) and Padden and Humphries (1980).

BSL: Black Sign Language. BSL developed largely within state schools for Black deaf children. A number of states in the SouthEast maintained separate residential schools for white and black deaf children until the 1960's. BSL shares much of the same basic vocabulary and overall structure as ASL.

caption(ing): In film and television, translation from spoken language into written language -- usually at the bottom of the screen. Captioned television programs are now mandated by federal law. Special devices called decoders are available which unmask television captioning normally invisible on the screen. Although a significant improvement in access to media, television captioning often presumes a high degree of fluency in English as well as the ability to read quickly. Captioning is also not without flaws, frequently resulting in garbled or erroneous translations.

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[*] Note: Although the following terms may have additional meanings, all definitions are given here within the context of deaf people and the Deaf community within the United States.

Cued (Speech): Developed by Orin Cornett in the 1960's, Cued speech uses eight distinct handshapes near the mouth to clarify certain English sounds which might not be discernible by lipreading. These handshapes have no relationship to fingerspelling, ASL or other synthesized sign systems.

day school: A school (for the deaf) which is not residential; students go home daily. Many day schools are actually classrooms for deaf students within a regular hearing school. Some deaf students remain exclusively in the class with other deaf students; others deaf students attend one or more classes with hearing students -- sometimes with, often without a qualified interpreter.

decibel (dB): A unit for measuring the relative intensity of sounds on a scale from zero for the lowest perceptible sounds to 130 for sounds so loud they can cause pain. Someone with average hearing has between 0 to 20 dB loss. Someone with profound deafness has a 90 dB or greater loss (usually bilaterally).

Deaf club: In rented church basements, local taverns or Deaf-owned buildings, these places have been <u>the</u> gathering place for members of the local Deaf community. Depending on the local community, such clubs meet nightly, weekly or infrequently, and could be informal or organized around specific events (such as a dance, dinner or holiday).

decoder: See 'captioning.'

disability: Although 'disability' and 'handicap' are often used interchangeably, a number of authors and persons with disabilities have attempted to make a conceptual distinction. 'Disability' is the functional limitation(s) which results from a particular condition (e.g., not being able to see, or not being able to walk). A 'handicap' is the external barrier(s) a person experiences -- whether physical or attitudinal (e.g. not being able to get information because it is only available in printed English, or being deemed <u>un</u>employable because of appearance, race or gender). The distinction between disability and handicap places the locus of responsibility for limitation on the physical environment and sociocultural attitudes -- not on the persons themselves. However, most deaf people disavow either term, and consider only other people with disabilities to be disabled or handicapped. Deaf people consider themselves simply deaf.

fingerspelling: A particular hand configuration for each letter of the alphabet. Currently in American fingerspelling, each letter is made using only one hand. Previously, each letter was made using both hands. Many other countries such as England and Australia continue to use both hands in fingerspelling. In fingerspelling, a particular word is spelled out. Fingerspelling seeps into other sign systems and ASL. The Rochester Method was an educational approach in which all words in a conversation were meticulously spelled out.

handicap: see 'disability.'

hard-of-hearing: A term usually indicating someone with a slight hearing loss. Padden and Humphries (1980, p. 39 ff.) note the relative nature of being hard-of-hearing. Among most hearing people, someone who is very hard-of-hearing is considered to be almost completely deaf. Among many deaf people, someone who is very hard-of-hearing is considered almost hearing (i.e., someone who is closer to being hearing than deaf).

hearing-impaired: A blanket term popularized in the 1970's to include all people with any degree of hearing loss -- from slight to profound. Most deaf people find the term stilted and one generally used only by hearing people.

home signs: Highly idiosyncratic signs and/or gestures which were developed within the home. Although home signs were more likely to be used between hearing parents and deaf children, a number of informants in this study reported using home signs -- especially those who were not proficient in or did not use ASL.

interpreter: Historically, interpreters for the deaf were hearing children of deaf parents or other persons who volunteered their time. Paid positions developed from a growing demand for qualified interpreters along with federal legislation which mandated interpreters in educational and, later, employment settings. There are now a number of interpreter training programs throughout the United States. Most interpreters are certified through a professional organization such as the national Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (R.I.D.) or similar organization. Because of the diversity in methods and systems, interpreters often need to be conversant in several different sign language systems as well as oral methods.

lipreading: Observing the lips and mouth movements of a speaker in order to understand his or her speech. Because many English sounds and words appear similar when lipread, it is estimated that even the best lipreader can understand only one-third of all spoken words. This proficiency can be improved by inference and by what Sacks (1989) calls "inspired guesswork," or decreased by environmental factors such as poor lighting and distance from the speaker.

mainstreaming: In the 1970's, "mainstreaming" was heralded as a panacea which would offset the presumed deprivations of residential schools. Deaf children were enrolled in regular hearing schools and hearing classes within their own home communities. These children could now mingle with hearing peers and reside at home with their own families. Unfortunately, most school systems and teachers were not trained to work with the Deaf -- having neither the educational background nor a knowledge of sign language. In practice, mainstreamed deaf students were often poorly educated and socially isolated. Mainstreaming has more recently fallen out of favor.

Manual English: A synthesized sign and speech system developed at Washington State School for the Deaf in the 1970's. Like other artificially developed systems, Manual English incorporates certain signs of ASL in an attempt to create a visual representation of English syntax.

oral/oralism: A communication method which espouses lipreading and spoken English. Traditionally, oralism has opposed the use of any sign language. The minority of deaf people who use this method are referred to as 'oralists.' Oralism is a highly charged issue within the Deaf community. Proponents see oralism as a means to communicate with and be included in the wider English speaking world. Critics point out that very few genuinely deaf people are successfully oral -- not because of differences in intelligence or endeavor, but because the central premise of oralism is ultimately flawed: you cannot make a deaf person be a hearing person. For many deaf adults, oralism is also a reminder of years of educational oppression and stigmatization. After years of being forbidden to use signs or gestures, those deaf children who were not successful at speaking or lipreading were demoted to classrooms which used signs as a last resort. These deaf students (who were ultimately the majority of students) were often felt to be less educable and, ultimately, less socially redeeming.

Pidgin Signed English (PSE): A admixture of ASL and other signed English systems. PSE typically develops 'in situ' between someone who uses ASL and someone familiar with signed English. PSE has some structures from ASL or English, and some from neither.

postlingually deaf: Someone who has lost their hearing <u>after</u> the acquisition of language (generally age 2 or 3). "Language" almost always refers to English.

prelingually deaf: Someone who has lost their hearing <u>before</u> the acquisition of language (generally age 2 or 3). "Language" almost always refers to English.

prevocationally deaf: This refers to someone who has lost their hearing before mid- to late adolescence. 'Prevocational' has replaced the 'pre-lingual' and 'post-lingual' markers as a more significantly consistent threshold in terms of social outcomes. Those who are prevocationally deaf are much more likely to be members of the Deaf community, marry other deaf people and use ASL.

relay: Relay services are available to allow deaf people to talk with hearing people who do not have a TTY. A third party ("relay") uses a TTY with the deaf person and voice with the hearing person. An increasing number of states and communities are providing relay service.

residential school: A school for the deaf at which most students live on campus. Depending on distance, cost and preference, students may travel home weekly, monthly or annually. Almost every state has at least one statewide residential school; there are also a few private residential schools. Although a handful of these schools continue to use the oral method, most residential schools now conduct instruction in spoken English and sign -- although it is more often a synthetic sign system rather than ASL.

SEE: The acronym used either for Seeing Essential English or Signing Exact English. Seeing Essential English was developed by David Anthony in the 1960's and Signing Exact English was derived from it by Gustason and colleagues in the 1970's. Like Manual English and Signed English, both SEEs are synthetic sign systems based on spoken English. SEE was intended to provide a grammatical sign language -- ignoring the fact that ASL, in fact, already has grammar and syntax, and that deaf children skilled in ASL have highly developed and transferable language skills. [Continued on next page.]

SEE: [Continued from previous page.] Although many SEE signs were borrowed from ASL, sign characteristics were often altered or modified to mirror English syntax. In a number of cases, signs were invented which do not follow expected structural and morphological characteristics of ASL, often resulting in highly artificial and constrained pseudo-words.

sign (or sign language): This is a broad term which includes any of a number of sign languages used with and among the Deaf (such as ASL, SEE, fingerspelling, Manual English, etc.). However, when used by most deaf people, 'sign' usually means ASL.

signed English: This is a confusing term because it can mean either (1) a more general term for any of the English-based systems (such as SEE or Manual English) or (2) a specifically developed sign system: "Signed English."

Sim-Com: Simultaneous Communication. Often used interchangably with 'Total Communication,' Sim-Com emphasizes the combined use of speech, signs and fingerspelling.

TDD: Telecommunication Device for the Deaf. See TTY.

Total Communication: In a more global sense, Total Communiation is a philosophy which encourages use and acceptance of whatever sign language, sign communication or oral method works for the individual deaf person. Practically, Total Communication was an educational method developed in the 1970's which stressed using <u>both</u> sign language and spoken English. Historically, Total Communication represents an important shift from denigration to recognition and inclusion of sign language within an educational setting. However, Total Communication maintains an insidious bias since only synthetic sign languages such as SEE or Cued Speech can actually be paired with spoken English. Trying to pair ASL and spoken English is little different than trying to speak English while simultaneously writing in another language (e.g. Russian).

TTY: <u>T</u>ele<u>ty</u>pe. Initially, old Western Union teletype machines were adapted for telephone use among the deaf. When both parties have a TTY, they can type their conversation back and forth using standard phone lines. TTYs are now manufactured in a wide range of models. While 'TTY' and 'TDD' are synonymous, TTY is viewed as the term deaf people historically used, compared to 'TDD' which is seen as a more officious term promoted by Hearing people.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Overview

Appendix A provides a brief demographic breakdown for the 150 informants interviewed. In order to insure anonymity for informants, not all demographic information can be given or detailed.

TOTAL NUMBER OF INFORMANTS
N = 150; 77 women (51.3%), 73 men (48.7%).

For those informants who had more than one female and one male caregiver, data are given only for the persons identified by the informant as the primary "mother" and "father". Demographics on three parents are not included here because they were deceased or remained absent from the time of the informant's birth or shortly thereafter.

TOTAL NUMBER OF MOTHERS AND FATHERS
N = 297; 149 mothers; 148 fathers

TOTAL NUMBER OF DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING PARENTS
N = 288; 146 mothers, 142 fathers

With the exception of Table H, all Tables concerning "Deaf parents" includes 9 hard-of-hearing mothers or fathers. Hard-of-hearing parents were included in this category because they were generally indistinguishable from educational and social patterns of other deaf parents.

Table B. Informants' Ages
N = 150

AGE:	18-19:	6	(4.0%)
	20-29:	35	(23.3%)
	30-39:	38	(25.3%)
	40-49:	30	(20.0%)
	50-59:	22	(14.7%)
	60-69:	12	(8.0%)
	70-79:	7	(4.7%)
	Total:	150	

Table C. Informants' Educational Level
N = 150

Less than High School Degree	2	(1.3%)
High School Degree	27	(18.0%)
Some College	14	(9.3%)
AA Degree	29	(19.3%)
College Degree	38	(25.3%)
Some Graduate School	6	(4.0%)
Master's Degree	19	(12.6%)
Ph.D., M.D., J.D.	15	(10.0%)
Total:	150	

Table D. Informants: Birth Order and Number of Siblings
N = 150

	Total		1st born	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+
Only child	27	(18.0%)	27				
1 of 2 sibs	58	(38.7%)	30	28			
1 of 3 sibs	33	(22.0%)	15	10	8		
1 of 4 sibs	19	(12.7%)	9	*	*	5	
1 of 5+ sibs	13	(8.7%)	4	*	*	*	*
Total:	150						

* Indicates less than 4 informants fit this description. Of the 123 informants with one or more siblings, 8 had at least one deaf sibling.

Table E. Informants' Current Marital Status* **
N = 150

Single	38	(25.3%)
Married	76	(50.7%)
Divorced	27	(18.0%)
Divorced/Remarried	7	(4.7%)
Widowed	2	(1.3%)
Total:	150	

*Marriage includes those who are legally married as well as common-law arrangements between heterosexual or same-sex partners.

**Of the 112 informants who are currently or have ever been married, only 4 are/were married to a deaf person.

Table F. Informants: Number of Children ***
N = 150

0	69	(46.0%)
1	29	(19.3%)
2	36	(24.0%)
3	10	(6.7%)
4 or more	6	(4.0%)
Total:	150	

*** Of the 81 informants having one or more children, 5 had at least one deaf child.

Table G. Informants' Primary Occupation*
N = 150

Managerial and Professional Specialty	125	(85.3%)**
Technical, Sales & Administrative Support	8	(5.3%)
Service Occupations	4	(2.7%)
Precision production, craft and repair	4	(2.7%)
Operators, Fabricators and Laborers	<4	(<2.0%)
Farming, Forestry and Fishing	<4	(<2.0%)
Homemaker	6	(4.0%)
Total:	150	

* Categories as defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor. Figures here include 12 informants who were retired or were full-time students. These informants are counted in categories in which they were employed or were planning to be employed.

** This category includes 65 informants described themselves as working full-time with deaf persons. 38 of these 65 were interpreters, interpreter trainees and/or interpreter trainers.

Table H. Parents' Hearing/Deaf Status*
N = 297

	Mother	Father
Deaf	142	137
Hard-of-hearing	4	5
Hearing	3	6
Totals:	149	148
Total Deaf & Hard-of-Hearing	146	142

* Status as described by informant. 3 parents were not included because they were deceased or remained absent from the time of the informant's birth or shortly thereafter.

Table I. Grandparents' Hearing/Deaf Status
N = 288

	Mother	Father
Both Parents Hearing	129 (88.4%)	131 (92.3%)
One Parent Hearing/One Deaf	2 (1.3%)	1 (0.7%)
Both Parents Deaf	15 (10.3%)	10 (7.0%)
Totals:	146	142

Table J. Deaf Parents' Educational Level
N = 150

	Mother	Father
Less than High School Degree	27 (18.5%)	20 (14.1%)
High School Degree	97 (66.4%)	94 (66.2%)
Some College	6 (4.1%)	3 (2.1%)
AA Degree	5 (3.4%)	6 (4.2%)
College Degree	6 (4.1%)	10 (7.0%)
Some Graduate School	2 (1.4%)	4 (2.8%)
Master's Degree Ph.D., M.D., J.D. }	3 (2.1%)	5 (3.6%)
Totals:	146	142

Table K. Deaf Parents' Type of School (K-12)
N = 288

	Mother	Father
Residential	123 (84.2%)	112 (85.9%)
Day	9 (6.2%)	12 (8.5%)
Hearing	2 (1.4%)	1 (0.7%)
Mixed*	12 (8.2%)	7 (4.9%)
Totals:	146	142

* 'Mixed' indicates at least four years at one type of school and four or more years at another type of school.

Table L. Deaf Parents' Communication in School*
N = 288

	Mother		Father	
Signing**	68	(46.6%)	63	(44.4%)
Oral	40	(27.4%)	46	(32.4%)
Both	38	(26.0%)	33	(23.2%)
Totals:	146		142	

* Table L is based on how informants assessed their parents' childhood communication -- not necessarily the official method used by the parent's school.

** As used here, 'signing' does not distinguish between various sign languages and sign systems.

Table M. Deaf Parents' Preferred Communication as Adults**
N = 288

	Mother		Father	
Signing***	130	(89.0%)	129	(90.9%)
Oral	4	(2.7%)	5	(3.5%)
Both	12	(8.2%)	8	(5.6%)
Totals:	146		142	

*** Like Table L, 'signing' does not distinguish between various sign languages and sign systems. However, from informants' descriptions as well as analysis of my fieldnotes, it would appear that 'signing' for most deaf adults meant American Sign Language.

Table N. Deaf Parents' Primary Occupation*
N = 288

	Mother	Father
Managerial and Professional Specialty	14 (9.6%)	23 (16.2%)
Technical, Sales and Administrative Support	7 (4.8%)	5 (3.5%)
Service Occupations	10 (6.8%)	8 (5.6%)
Precision production, craft and repair	**	18 (12.7%)
Operators, Fabricators and Laborers	41 (28.1%)	82 (57.7%)
Farming, Forestry and Fishing	**	6 (4.2%)
Homemaker	74 (50.7%)	**
Totals:	146	142

* Categories as defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor.

** Less than 3.

APPENDIX B: INSIDER RESEARCH

At the Dining Table

In my field statements leading up to this dissertation, I tackled the anticipated problems of "insider" research. I surveyed the literature and carefully crafted a defense and justication for insider research. Much of my stance cited numerous authors who have pointed out the potential benefits of insider research (including Srinivas 1969; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Gwaltney 1980; Ablon 1981; Aguilar 1981; Messerschmidt 1981; Stephenson and Greer 1981; Hayano 1982; and Fahim 1982) and those authors who noted the subjective and relative nature of being an "insider" (including Asad 1979; Molgaard and Byerly 1981; Auge 1982; Colson 1982; Said 1985). All this was written _before_ my fieldwork. While these writers have raised important theoretical and practical issues regarding insider research, there was one significant omission. These authors had not addressed what it would be like for _me_ to be that insider.

Previous discussions have generally considered the problem of insider research on a broader scale: studying one's own cultural group or community. My research focus was much more intimate. In effect, I was studying my own family. The highly personal nature of this research affected the entire project -- from interactions with informants to preparing the final version of this document. It ultimately became lodged within my own family home as I sat down at the dining table and tried to explain to my parents what I was doing: How much of their lives would I expose to the outside world? Much of what I will discuss here is not unique to being an insider. It is an intimate part of being an anthropologist and a field researcher. However, the complications of being an inside researcher who is a hearing child of deaf parents enhances particular concerns and raises specific methodological issues. Here, I briefly discuss three issues: 1) how certain methods reflected a hearing or a deaf bias; 2) the problems of "distance" between informants and researcher; 3) how my own parents and I were affected by this study.

A Distant World Called Home

In the final scenes of the movie 'Blade Runner,' a dying android describes how he has seen sights in the universe that most humans can only read about because of the immense distances in time and space. He describes distant galaxies, erupting supernovas and swirling nebulas. As I finish this dissertation, I feel a similar joy and frustration. I, too, have heard and seen stories that I can never fully convey. This is not merely the angst of post-modernism. It reflects the limits of research that was designed from a hearing perspective. I had anticipated interviews that could be tape-recorded. I foresaw interactions that would be impersonal and time-limited. I expected they would do most of the talking.

When I received contact sheets back from potential informants, I was pleased at how many men and women initially agreed to be tape recorded. Taking field notes would be so much easier. However, after the first few interviews, I realized that I was missing a great deal by having only an auditory and not a visual record. What about informants' faces, their eyes, their looks, their gestures, their signs? Time did not allow a revision of the interview schedule; money constraints did not allow purchase of video equipment. More importantly, many informants acknowledged that they would be reluctant to participate if they had been videotaped. I was left to write down notes as the tape recorder ran. Yet, even this method created problems. As previously discussed in Chapter 6, my "active" listening meant keeping almost constant eye contact with informants. Informants repeatedly acknowledged an increased comfort level ("I know you're paying attention to me") when I did this, and invariably stopped talking or lost their train of thought whenever I glanced downward to take notes.

Although I had anticipated a certain amount of interconnectedness among some informants, I was unprepared for how often I, too, was invariably connected to them. Several informants knew one or both of my parents. Another informant's parent had gone to school with my father; another with my mother. "Didn't you used to teach at St. Rita's?" "Were you at that Deaf convention in Texas in the 70's?" My initial plan to get a representative sample was transformed by its very nature into one which was much more of a network. And, in keeping with the traditions of a lively and interactive Deaf news network, I became messenger and message: "Tell Susan hello for me." "What's happening at the school for the deaf?" "Can I announce at the [deaf] club that you're coming to do these interviews?" "Do you know anyone who wants an interpreting job?"

Instead of anticipated free time between interviews, I frequently found myself racing to make the next one. One hour interviews went for three, four and five hours. In almost all cases, there were at least fifteen to thirty minutes of "leaving" behavior after we ended the interview. Sometimes we would stand in the doorway; sometimes I would be in the car and the informant would be signing to me from the doorway. One time I ended up going back into the house and staying for an additional three hours. Instead of a momentary stranger, I was welcomed as part of their special world. Informants were concerned about me: Had I eaten? Did I need a place to stay? Was I having any fun?

A frequent part of the interview process was a reciprocal exchange of family histories: mine for theirs. They wanted to hear about my parents, about my life. Not as an ultimatum, but largely out of trying to learn about their own lives and history. Recognizing my attempts to maintain researcher detachment was how a Hearing person would have done it, I abandoned attempts to keep myself totally anonymous during the interviews. I became more relaxed about talking about myself. If some of my initial methods reflected a hearing bias, there were also aspects of this fieldwork which meshed quite well with Deaf culture: open-ended conversations, dialogue, lengthy and detailed explanations and just plain old story-telling. Although most informants did not know me or my parents, often memories of my own family history surfaced as they told me of theirs. Until these interviews, I had never told anyone about the times I had faked phone calls on behalf of my parents. I had forgotten the time when one of my grade school teachers assigned me to give a class presentation on 'Deafness' while all the other kids got topics like 'Baseball,' 'Sewing,' and 'Pets.'

Fieldwork did not end my contact with many informants. I continue to get letters, phone calls and even visits from informants.

Shattering the Distance

Jackson (1987) warns fieldworkers never to turn off the tape recorder: You might miss something. Generally, I followed this advice. Keeping the tape recorder on provided me with some memorable quotes after an interview had apparently concluded or even as I was half-way out the door. Yet, there were moments when informants asked me to turn off the tape recorder. Sometimes informants told me things about themselves which had little or nothing to do with having deaf parents. Sometimes I heard things that had never shared with another human being. While disclosures to strangers are not unusual in fieldwork, these remarks were made to someone with deaf parents -- not to a researcher. One woman asked me point blank: "Which of our secrets will you tell?" From remarks like these, it was clear that informants often separated out me the hearing son of deaf parents from me the researcher. Higgins (1980) suggests that "a low refusal rate is only one indication that trust has been established" (p. 187). As I look back upon this study, trust, indeed, was a critical issue. It was undeniably my shared history that provided me entree into many of these women and men's lives. And, our shared family history was a source of trust during the interview process itself: both in terms of what they could tell me and in terms of what I would tell the world.

Researchers have noted that insiders are often able to get more information from respondents than outside interviewers. Often, interviews with insiders are likely to be more visceral and contentious (Sattler 1970; Phillips 1971). Higgins (1980) suggests that "the information a hearing researcher would obtain from the deaf would be more idyllic and less militant than what a deaf researcher might obtain" (186). Looking over these results, such emphases do appear. Compared to previous studies on hearing children of deaf parents, these informants generally described more frequent and more intense feelings of difference -- not only from the Hearing world but from the Deaf world as well. As they talked to me, these men and women would more frequently say things like, "I wouldn't ordinarily say this..." Or, "Most people don't know this, but I know you do."

As most fieldworkers have observed, even explicit reminders of the researcher's identity (whether tape recorder, videocamera or pen and paper) often recede during the interview or fieldwork process (see Mann 1977). Yet, this population was quite familiar with the prying eye of outsiders (including researchers). To many informants, the tape recorder -- not me -- represented the outside world. Asking me to turn off the tape recorder or prefacing their taped remarks ("I'm not sure I want this taped, but let's keep going for now...") allowed another type of interaction which shattered the distance which a researcher's gaze invariably creates. Although I would remind informants that I was still trying to keep mental notes, I also became more aware of an informant's trust. It was a level of trust based on our bond of having deaf parents. What informants told me during these times was not actually outside the range of other informants' experiences. More importantly, however, such moments of disclosure gave them an opportunity to step outside of the interview. It also gave me an opportunity to be one of them.

Mitchell (1991) discusses the paradox of intimacy: "a high degree of trust achieved early in an investigation may actually curtail a researcher's freedom to look and ask" (p. 103). I often found just the opposite to be true. Informants were often more free not only to tell me details of their own lives, but to ask me questions. Sometimes both of us -- the informant and myself -- would talk about the research process itself. We could both momentarily step outside of our defined roles as interviewer and informant be two adults who had deaf parents. We could both acknowledge the misperceptions the outside world had about deaf people -- and how researchers had not always helped in this matter. I could ask which "secrets" she was afraid I would tell after first saying, "And then we can talk about what I can tell to those outside."

Reconstruction

Higgins (1980) talks about how his personal experiences as the hearing son of deaf parents had a profound impact on his research and ultimately on his book. Higgins, however, does not talk about how doing his research affected him. Agar (1980) points out that "it is just such a concern with the intersubjective breaches between ethnographer, informant and audience that helps explain the recent interest in hermeneutics in anthropology" (p. 231). Toward the end of these interviews, one informant asked me about listening to all these stories: "Do you think it has changed you at all?" He had cut right through to the heart of the matter. Wasn't I, too, answerable to the question: How did having deaf parents make a difference in your life, in who you are? And, how did the research itself affect my own sense of self and my parents?

I first recognized one of the difficulties of being an inside researcher on this topic when I went home to visit my parents. My mother innocently asked who I was going to see. Had I seen the Smith's daughter yet, and what was she like? Was I going to see the Jones' son? He must be in his forties by now. And, both of my parents wanted to know what people were telling me. In _The Hunger of Memory_, Rodriguez (1982) describes how the more he identified with the academic world, the greater his sense of alienation from his father: the more he learned, the more his father shrunk. My parents grew during this process. My parents abided by the rules of confidentiality and anonymity which appear strangely impersonal and distancing in the Deaf world. They allowed me to use their own stories in the preface and epilogue to this dissertation. And, finally, without knowing the potential renown or shame such public disclosures might bring, they gave me permission to write this dissertation as I saw fit. Unlike any of the one hundred and fifty informants, my name would be unavoidably public. Because of the intimate and interactive network within the Deaf world, my parents would share in that recognition.

Through this dissertation, I have learned so much more about my parents' history and my own cultural heritage. The difference, however, is that much of it -- as explained and written here -- is told in a hearing way. Sidransky (1990) says that "If there were a way, if I could, I would write this book in sign language. I cannot." (p. 3). Shortly before completing this dissertation, I was privileged to be asked to give a keynote speech on Deaf culture at a national conference for the Deaf. What I learned from writing this dissertation was that it was important not only to give the speech in sign language (without voice), but to give it in the "Deaf way." This included identifying myself through my parents, giving the speech in ASL without voice, addressing the audience interactively and informally, and drawing from a rich history of oral traditions: telling stories.

One aspect of being an anthropologist is that you <u>don't</u> keep your distance. In trying to learn another's point of view, you become as fully absorbed as possible into the hearts and minds of those around you. The line is different for each anthropologist -- according to the particular circumstances, the anthropologist's own comfort level and critical decisions regarding ethical standards. The process is often one of enmeshing, mirroring, reflecting and, ultimately, losing one's identity. Being an inside researcher intensified this experience. Among this group of one hundred and fifty men and women, I lost a certain sense of individuality. The mark of distinction that I hold among most other people was no longer unique. Although I considered differences as well as similarities, the points of similarity were what informants themselves pulled for. Most asked me questions which emphasized our similarities: "Do you do this?" "Are others you've talked to like us?"

Distance is also important in anthropology. From the synergy of temporary insider as well as the eventual return to your own culture come insights about yourself and those who have been studied. But, what about those of us who began as members of the group? How does our intimacy affect not our entry -- but our leaving? How do you create distance in order to explain these experiences to outsiders? For myself, distance was sometimes measured by intervening periods of travel, by geographic distance, by birthdays, by deaths. Leaving, of course, is a misnomer. I can never "leave" being the hearing son of deaf parents. It is part of who I am. But I also realized I have a very far away place even within myself. I am also hearing. This is my <u>dual</u> heritage.

I am also neither hearing nor deaf. I am a guy who likes to cook Italian food and backpack in the Sierras. I am a 41 year old man poised on the brink of finding a new career. I am done with a dissertation about hearing children of deaf parents. I am home.