

What Deaf Parents “Hear”

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Abstract

This article will attempt to shed light on the deaf-parent population, which generally lives between two hearing worlds: hearing grandparents and hearing children.

To study the feelings of deaf persons toward their hearing parents and children, we will use information culled from a deaf parenting group. This article will present the findings of a categorical content analysis of childhood memories and current parenting experiences expressed by the group. Within these memories and experiences, this analysis discerned three main themes – communication, capability, and “differentness.” This reenactment by parents raises the possibility that the “creation” of a different life for deaf children would lead to different memories and perhaps more positive parenting experiences.

Key Words: hearing grandparents, hearing children, differentness, creation

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This article will attempt to shed light on the deaf-parent population, which generally lives between two hearing worlds: hearing grandparents and hearing children. Many studies have proven that most deaf people are born to hearing parents, marry each other, and 90% of the time have hearing children. Therefore, the phenomenon described and examined here typifies the deaf community: an island of silence in a sea of sound.

To study the feelings of the deaf toward their hearing parents and children, we will use information culled from a deaf parenting group that met in a city in central Israel. The group was led by a hearing-impaired facilitator and conducted in sign language, allowing participants free and open expression “within the family,” which they used to share with their peers difficult childhood memories and complex parenting experiences. The group was intended to develop parenting skills, but the deaf parents also exploited it to broadcast the voices and experiences of both worlds.

This article will present the findings of a categorical content analysis of childhood memories and current parenting experiences expressed by the group. Within these memories and experiences, this analysis discerned three main themes – communication, capability, and “differentness.” Participants reported numerous communication difficulties within their families of origin, resulting in feelings of detachment and isolation similar to those experienced in their relationships with their hearing children. Likewise, these parents grew up in an environment that underestimated their capabilities in various areas, which may also have shaped their self-image as parents. And finally, parents recalled a strong sense of difference and “otherness,” often accompanied by feelings of deprivation, which they feel as well in raising their hearing children. This reenactment by parents raises the possibility that the “creation” of a different life for deaf children would lead to different memories and perhaps more positive parenting experiences.

Deaf Parents

Ninety percent of deaf persons marry each other and give birth to hearing children. These parents must then cope with the complexity of raising children audiotically different from them. The ramifications in terms of communication, as well as emotionally and socially, also affect parental confidence. Deaf parents generally doubt their capabilities, since their hearing parents and other hearing figures (such as professionals) implicitly and even explicitly impress upon them that deaf persons can't and don't know how to raise a hearing child. This attitude also accounts for the overinvolvement of families of origin in their deaf children's own nuclear families, often undermining their parental role. Yet Jones, Strom, and Daniels (1989) established that deaf parents are no less capable than hearing ones. These researchers studied nineteen deaf couples raising hearing children and found that these parents demonstrated good parenting skills according to their hearing

children as well as to objective tests (Mallory, Schein, & Zingle, 1992). In addition, deaf parents often have unique relationships with their hearing children (Filer & Filer, 2000; Preston, 1994; Torres, 2004; Zarem, 2003).

Sign language is a legitimate and prevalent language in families composed of deaf parents and hearing children (Singleton & Tittle, 2000). This language is accepted today as a language in every respect, possessing a unique grammatical structure and expressing a full range of emotions and opinions. Deaf and/or hearing children who learn sign language as their mother tongue acquire it very naturally, moving from one linguistic-development stage to the next, just as children acquire a spoken language via babbling, then isolated words, simple sentences, etc.

Yet not all deaf parents speak to their hearing children in sign language. Some parents are reluctant to expose their children to this language for fear of “converting” them into deaf people, although no research has proven that learning sign language delays speech acquisition. Other parents eschew sign language because of society’s negative image of it and of deaf persons, which even they themselves have internalized. Still other parents don’t teach their children sign language lest parents rely on children to translate for them and bridge worlds (Jones, Strom, & Daniels, 1989).

These families then speak two parallel languages – one that parents speak to each other, and one that they speak to their children – hampering fluent communication between family members. Preston’s (1994) study of hearing children born to deaf parents found that most of these children wished their parents had taught them this language fully. Instead, detachment and communication difficulties plague these parent-child relationships.

However, hearing children who master both languages – speech and sign language – can indeed bridge worlds for their parents and often function as their translators, officially or not. Parent-child “role reversal” marks many of these families, especially when small children are involved (Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan, 1996; Preston, 1994), and interferes with parental authority.

Many deaf parents also bemoan their very limited access to parenting education (Mallory et al., 1992), inasmuch as existing programs don’t meet their unique needs. Deaf parents really need this information, particularly since their hearing parents can’t serve as role models (Hoffmeister, 1985). (After all, *their* children were deaf.) Likewise, retrospective interviews with deaf adults have yielded a model of limited, complex, and frustrating interactions with their hearing parents, from whom they therefore couldn’t learn much about parenting (Foster, 1989a). Despite these obstacles, various studies (Charlson, 1990) have shown that hearing children raised by deaf parents are just as mature and self-efficacious and experience no more emotional, social, or educational difficulties than the population at large.

The deaf person's self-image is affected not just by the messages he/she receives from his/her immediate environment but by the deaf community's collective assessment (Padden, 1996). Much like an ethnic minority relative to mainstream society, the deaf community has characteristics separating it from hearing society, which it perceives as "normal" or "the majority." This community considers itself inferior to the hearing community, and research has discovered lower self-esteem among deaf persons than among hearing ones (Bat Chava, 1994; Desselle, 1994). This perception may also influence feelings of parental competency.

Psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and linguists have all studied the deaf community, and all define it differently (Foster, 1989b; Padden, 1996; Rose, 1995). However, perhaps the broadest definition is that of Higgins and Nash (1987). In addition to the geographic and linguistic components of other definitions, these two researchers emphasized that community members feel social unity and a shared identity (Foster, 1989b; Reagan, 2002). Hearing children are not naturally part of this community and its unique culture; rather, they're part of hearing society – the majority culture – about which their parents don't feel they know enough to teach them (Singleton & Tittle, 2000).

This phenomenon of two cultures within one family can also be seen in deaf parents' families of origin. There too, hearing parents could scarcely transmit deaf society's values and culture to their children, which undermined these youngsters' construction of self-identity (Glickman & Carey, 1993).

However, unlike the detachment between hearing parents and deaf culture, when parents are deaf but their children are not, there's a simple solution to cultural transmission problems: hearing grandparents. These figures can and frequently do replace parents in integrating the children into mainstream society. Despite this setup's many advantages over that in which the deaf parents grew up, it broadens the gap between parents and children and accentuates their differences at the expense of their similarities.

Thus, deaf parenting isn't easy and is affected by various personal, family, and cultural processes. Nonetheless, little has been written about deaf parents, and their "voice" is rarely heard. Therefore, we've chosen to examine these parents' childhood memories and parental experiences in order to clarify how they were/are created. We were especially interested in identifying variables common to both realms. Such discoveries may illuminate the main challenges with which deaf parents grapple, and a shift in attitude toward these variables may improve deaf lives.

Method

This paper is based on a categorical content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) of a psycho-educational group for deaf parents, which met from December 2005 to February 2006 in a city in central Israel. It was established by a social worker from the local authority who works directly with deaf residents of his city. The social worker recognized the need to develop deaf parenting skills. However, given his limited knowledge of sign language – the language in which most of his clients communicate – he relinquished the group facilitator’s role to a hard-of-hearing educational counselor who works in the Institute for the Advancement of Deaf Persons in Israel (and who coauthored this article). This non-profit was founded in 1993 by hearing and deaf professionals to initiate, develop, and implement programs benefiting the deaf and hearing-impaired community in Israel and to empower this population and increase its integration into society as a whole. Naturally, institute management readily referred an appropriate group moderator.

Participants

Twelve deaf parents age between 35-55 attended the group, including four couples. All were born to hearing parents and were raising hearing children ages four to sixteen. All were born deaf or hard of hearing or lost their hearing in childhood. Six emigrated from the former Soviet Union.

The local social worker had worked with most of them, and by word of mouth he recruited them for the group and explained its goals.

Group Structure and Goals

The group was defined a “deaf parents’ group” aiming to develop parenting skills among deaf adults. The group met for ten ninety-minute, late-afternoons sessions in a municipal building. This closed group was conducted in sign language.

Two goals were set for the group:

- (1) identifying parenting difficulties among deaf parents;
- (2) developing parenting skills accordingly.

As a novice, the moderator was closely supervised by the first coauthor, a group facilitator very familiar with the deaf population.

As stated, the group was defined as psycho-educational (Reid, 1997; Toseland & Rivas, 2005) and employed various semistructured intervention

methods to raise relevant topics for participants' discussion consideration. Each meeting had a defined goal, for which an appropriate method was chosen to stimulate discussion. For instance, to raise the issue of communication between deaf parents and their hearing children, role-playing was used, or to work on parents' attitudes toward themselves and the hearing world, use was made of drawing and sentence completion reflecting personal opinion and outlook.

Though the group was founded to develop parenting skills, focusing on understanding participants' children and their best interests, much group time was devoted to the parents themselves and their feelings, attitudes, and needs. The theory here was that the more the parent is self-aware and feels someone is willing and able to contain him, the more he can appropriately contain his children. Thus, parents were invited to share childhood experiences and air their feelings toward their hearing children.

Data Gathering

The group facilitator (and coauthor) was asked to summarize each meeting, and this material served as the basis of her ongoing supervision. One pronounced element of the resulting group narrative was the parents' wealth of childhood memories and extensive parenting experiences. Parents seemed to reenact childhood through parenthood, and it seemed important to us to isolate themes common to both phases, which could be understood against the backdrop of deaf adults' psychosocial development. To this end, the following steps were taken by the first coauthor, a social worker with many years of experience with the deaf population and with theory and research within the field (Levinger, 2003; Levinger, 2006; Zecharia, Levinger, & Reisfeld, 1994):

The group narrative underwent – as per Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) – a categorical-content analysis, which examined the contents of the meetings and participants' shared themes. Parents' remarks were divided into “childhood memories” and “parenting experiences,” and each group was then subdivided into five content categories:

Childhood memories: loneliness, suffering, lack of belief in abilities, lack of communication with the environment, and feelings of deprivation.

Parenting experiences: children not listening, feelings of disappointment and failure as a parent, loneliness, helplessness, and shame.

Further contemplation of these themes suggested an alternative grouping into three categories:

- (1) Communication – including childhood memories of *lack of communication with the environment and loneliness* in childhood memories and parental experiences of *lack of listening on children’s part and loneliness*.
- (2) Capability – including childhood memories of *lack of faith in ability* and parental experiences of *feelings of disappointment and failure as a parent and helplessness*.
- (3) Differentness – including childhood memories of *feelings of deprivation* and parental experiences of *feelings of shame*.

The moderator then confirmed and reinforced this categorization.

Findings

As stated, three categories of statements were culled from the group narrative: communication, capability, and differentness. The findings will be presented below regarding each of these variables, as manifest in childhood memories and parenting experiences.

Communication

Deaf parents’ childhood memories depict loneliness and isolation, which they attribute to communication difficulties they experienced: “I felt very alone during my childhood. I didn’t like visiting family because I didn’t understand what they were saying. To this day I don’t like going to family functions.”

Likewise, one participant emphasized that her difficulties communicating with her mother left her in a vacuum in terms of the information necessary to learn her way around her environment: “I remember they would put me on a train to the dormitory without saying anything. Mother didn’t explain things to me, where I was going.” Perhaps because parent and child had trouble communicating, this mother chose to say nothing.

The loneliness and isolation participants experienced in childhood also characterize their relationships with their own children, which are also connected to communication difficulties: “When the children speak among themselves, I sometimes feel left out, because I don’t understand what they’re saying, or they don’t want to tell me.”

Perhaps these difficulties stem from the fact that there’s no one language the entire family speaks. When the children speak among themselves, their parents can’t join the conversation or even understand it. This situation is quite prevalent in

families composed of deaf parents and hearing children and leaves parents isolated and disowned in their own homes. Furthermore, parents depend on their children to communicate with the hearing world, which generates considerable tension: "They have no patience to tell us what they said on the phone or to call for us, or they don't answer the phone. They say, 'I have no time now. Later.'"

An analysis of both childhood memories and parenting experiences bolsters the assumption that communication remains a significant issue throughout deaf persons' lives. Having grown up in hearing families, deaf adults remember their childhood loneliness, disconnection, and communication difficulties. And as parents struggling to communicate with their hearing children, they again feel cut off from their environment.

Capability

Participants' childhood memories as well as current parenting experiences reflect a distinct lack of belief in personal ability: "Mother would always take me wherever I had to go and pick me up afterward, even when I wanted to manage by myself..." We see here a gap between the deaf child's personal sense of aptitude, of her capacity for independence, and the parental perception.

This lack of faith in ability has plagued participants throughout their lives: "...to this day my parents take care of me and don't trust me to manage on my own."

Perhaps that perspective also influences how their children perceive them: "My children ask, 'What, you can work? How do you communicate on the job?'"

These feelings are often reinforced by hearing figures – parents, children, and others. Such attitudes affect the deaf parent in two directions:

On the one hand, the parent resolves to succeed where everyone says he can't: "I want to give my children everything (to buy them things)... I want to be a better father." On the other hand, this outlook clashes with his lack of confidence and reinforces feelings of failure:

"...but I can't, and I feel I'm disappointing them."

"Maybe they think I'm not a good mother? "

"When my child doesn't listen to me, I feel that I've failed as a father, that I didn't educate him properly. I'm disappointed, hurt."

"When I walk my child to school, the teacher generally speaks to him, and I don't understand what she's saying. I feel helpless when he translates..."

Throughout their lives, from childhood to parenthood, deaf persons absorb their environment's underestimation of their abilities, which very likely directly influences their own belief in themselves and their parenting abilities.

Differentness

Deaf parents' childhood memories of feeling different reveal their sense of suffering: "I suffered, they would tease me..." And sadness: "I remember well that I felt sad." And anger: "I'm angry. I felt a lot of anger in my childhood."

Certain participants connected these feelings directly to their deafness:

"I was the only Jew; they would tease me and laugh at me in the shower because I'd been circumcised. Both Jewish and deaf..."

"In school the coach wouldn't choose me to play – though I was better than the hearing player – just because I was deaf."

All this despite the massive efforts invested in "converting" the deaf child, as much as possible, into a hearing person.

In addition, communication difficulties evidently limit the deaf child's relationship with his parents. Most hearing parents cannot communicate with their deaf children about their inner world. To quote one woman in the group: "I grew up virtually without a mother, because she could hear, and there was no relationship between us."

However, one of the clearest expressions of strangeness and difference within the family, along with a strong feeling of deprivation, was the following: "Mother died and left everything to my brother and nothing to me, because there was no communication between us. I felt alone and sad." In other words, not only could this mother not communicate with her deaf daughter, but she favored the girl's hearing brother, who "hit the jackpot" emotional and financially.

The experience of strangeness and otherness also dominates deaf persons' feelings as parents. Clearly, they worry that their differentness – their deafness – will cloud their children's future: "What bothered me most was where my children were concerned, that people wouldn't want to marry them because their parents were deaf." In other words, deaf parents perceive themselves as belonging to a not especially attractive minority, which can put their children at a disadvantage. Their words reflect their shame about who they are and a desperate attempt to "infect" the children with their own handicaps:

"When I take my kids to the mall, I generally don't speak sign language – or I half-sign, half-speak – because the kids are embarrassed if people stare. "

"I ask my children not to speak sign language to me, so people won't think I can't hear. It's awkward for me when they think I'm an idiot or retarded."

These statements reflect the influence of hearing society's perception of the deaf community. Since this perception is one of inferiority and disability, parents fear that society will treat their children the way it treats them.

Discussion

This study has examined deaf parents' childhood memories and current parenting experiences. An analysis of the findings detailed above suggests that the three themes according to which the memories were sorted dominate the deaf person's entire life. The discussion will attempt to understand why these motifs stand out by studying the relationship between childhood memories and parenting experiences in order to determine whether the "creation" of these memories will lead to the "creation" of more positive parenting experiences.

Studying the importance of communication throughout the deaf person's life may deepen our understanding of the significance of this variable, which figures in both childhood memories and parenting experiences.

As stated, 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents who have had no prior contact or relationship with the deaf community (Gregory, 1991; Jackson & Turnbull, 2004; Niemann, Greenstein, & David, 2004). These parents generally perceive such births as crises and wrenching existential experiences, as do parents coping with a handicapped or developmentally delayed child. Audiological differences between parents and children have various ramifications, which can accompany the deaf child/adult throughout his life.

One area in which deafness hits particularly hard is that of speech. Whereas hearing children intuitively learn to speak by listening, deaf children must learn deliberately and via alternative communication channels, such as sight, touch, and vibrations (Calderon & Greenberg, 2003; Marschark, 1997; Meadow Orland, Spencer, & Koester, 2004). Until hearing parents discover their child's deafness, they communicate with him as if he hears. They may speak to him without his being able to see their faces, or they may play him music or given him musical toys. Even after parents know their child is deaf, they're not always responsive to his special communication needs, due to their emotional state and because they're unaware of these needs or of how to work with them (Meadow Orland, 2002).

One of the first questions hearing parents must deal with is what language to speak to their deaf child. Several communication methods are recognized and prevalent in the field:

- (1) Oral communication – emphasizing the use of the spoken language and the teaching of speech development skills: lip reading, exploitation of remnants of hearing, and articulation.
- (2) Manual communication – using sign language as the child’s mother tongue his main communication channel. Sign language is customary within the deaf community, has its own grammatical structure, and allows the child to connect with his environment without resorting to the speech that’s so hard for him. According to this method, sign language is the deaf person’s natural language.
- (3) Inclusive communication – incorporating all possible means of communication, including speech, sign language, and combinations of the two. This approach generally uses speech and sign language simultaneously but upholds the grammar of the former (Plaut, 1994).

Most hearing parents choose to communicate with their deaf children orally or by words and gestures. Few master sign language, so communication suffers. Deaf children often can’t convey to their parents their feelings, thoughts, experiences, etc., so they’re left isolated from their most significant figures (Gregory, Bishop, & Sheldon, 1995). This isolation is quite apparent in the childhood memories detailed above. For example: “I didn’t like visiting the family, because I didn’t understand what they were saying.”

Frustration strikes not only deaf persons but their parents, who can’t communicate fluently with their children. According to Preston (1994), only 13% of deaf adults communicate well with at least one of their hearing parents. Communication between deaf persons and their hearing siblings and other relatives is also strained. Deaf children may thus feel tremendously isolated within their families and disconnected from the family experience occurring around them (Gregory, Bishop, and Sheldon, 1995). Communication difficulties continue when deaf adults become parents, as evident in such parenting experiences as “When the children speak among themselves, I sometimes feel left out, because I don’t understand what they’re saying, or they don’t want to tell me.”

This reaction may stem from the fact that not all deaf parents speak to their hearing children in sign language. Some are reluctant to expose their children to this language, lest they “convert” them into deaf people themselves (Hoffmeister, 1985) or later rely on them to translate and bridge worlds (Jones et al., 1989). Thus within one family are frequently two parallel languages: the one parents speak to each other and the one they speak to the children.

One question that arises in the childhood memories and parenting experiences is “What so powerfully influenced deaf persons’ sense of their own capabilities both as children and as parents?” To answer this question, let us first

study this variable theoretically, analyzing the psychosocial processes impacting on the building of the sense of personal aptitude.

According to Erikson (1963, p. 251), the foundations of feelings of aptitude are laid in the second developmental stage, “autonomy vs. shame and doubt,” which takes from the ages of one and a half to three. Until this stage, children are controlled almost totally by their adult caretakers. However, once physical development begins, as does speech and social differentiation ability, children begin exploring their surroundings and interacting independently. Even more, they take pride in their newfound motoric capabilities and want to do everything themselves. Coping successfully with the psychosocial task at this stage depends, according to Erikson (1963, p. 251), on parents’ (1) gradually “letting go” of their children, freeing them to execute and master activities suited to their capabilities; and (2) relinquishing control and overprotectiveness, which reinforce doubt and shame. The deaf child’s motoric and physiological development resembles that of the hearing child, so the deaf child also wants to explore his surroundings and abilities (Meadow Orland, Spencer, & Koester, 2004). However, whereas the hearing child can verbalize his desires, the deaf one cannot (Henderson & Hendershott, 1991). Similarly, since parents don’t realize what deaf children can do, they tend to overprotectively rein in their explorations and exercise of new skills much more than they limit their hearing children (Meadow Orland et al., 2004). To quote one woman in the group: “Mother would always take me wherever I had to go and pick me up afterward, even when I wanted to manage by myself....”

Feelings of aptitude continue developing in the next stage, according to Erikson (1963, p. 255) – “initiative vs. guilt – goal,” which takes place between the ages of three and six. During this period, the child is challenged to explore his social environment, execute tasks, and acquire skills, thereby winning environmental approval. As stated, one important skill that develops fully in this stage is speech (Erikson, 1963). Through proficient speech, the child can expand his physical and human exploration. However, as also stated, deaf children can’t acquire or understand speech intuitively and in a non-directed way, as can hearing children. At this age, audiologists therefore labor to teach the deaf child to speak clearly and correctly and to read lips.

The feelings of effort and often failure stemming from this stage accompany the deaf child even into elementary school. This phase, which Erikson (1963, p. 258) called “industry vs. inferiority,” applies to children ages six to eleven. Their main task now is to be formally educated in basic skills needed in society. The concept of productivity becomes relevant, since the child is learning the cultural technology in which he lives, so he learns how things happen, act upon, and are acted upon in his environment (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992).

The danger at this stage is that the child will feel inferior rather than productive whenever he senses he can’t do or learn what’s expected of him,

whereas his peers can. The child may even attribute his ineptitude to factors beyond his control, such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, etc. At this point, a feeling of competence depends principally on his scholastic achievements, not just on how hard working and determined he is (Erikson, 1963). Deaf children start school with many linguistic deficiencies, which also interfere with their ability to accumulate age-appropriate knowledge. Thus, they begin their studies feeling inferior to their classmates. Compared to hearing children, a significant number of deaf ones perform less well, behave immaturely, and have trouble tolerating frustration (Kluwin, Stinson, & Colarossi, 2002; Kyle & Harris, 2006; Marschark, 199; Rodda, Grove, & Finch, 1986).

A feeling of incompetence plagues deaf persons even as parents, as manifest in the quotations above: “Maybe they think I’m a bad mother?” Or “When my child doesn’t listen to me, I feel that I’ve failed as a father, that I didn’t educate him properly. I’m disappointed, hurt.” These feelings may fester, as noted, amid the implicit and explicit messages conveyed by parents and other hearing figures, such as professionals, that a deaf person can’t and doesn’t know how to raise a hearing child. Hence also the overinvolvement of families of origin in the deaf nuclear family, thereby often undermining parental functioning. All this though Jones et al. (1989) found deaf parents no less capable than hearing ones.

The two variables specified above – communication and aptitude – very much reinforce the deaf person’s feelings of differentness. Despite all efforts to make him as similar as possible to a hearing person, he repeatedly experiences “otherness,” all the more so as he gets older and especially during adolescence. The deaf adolescent’s family often finds its illusions shattered. Even in families in which they thought that if only they’d work hard enough, their deaf child would “hear,” they realize that that was only a dream (Cohen, 1991; Moores, HATHO, & Dunn, 2001). Parents see that the child will never speak as well as hearing children, that he’ll never hear any better and will always be different.

As detailed above, the deaf person’s self-image is affected not just by the messages he/she receives from his immediate environment but by the collective assessment of the deaf community (Padden, 1996). Members of this community share similar characteristics separating them from the hearing community, which they perceive as “normal,” just as ethnic minorities view the majority. As stated, and as research has shown, the deaf community is viewed as inferior and inept relative to the hearing population (Bat Chava, 1994 Crowe, 2003; Deselle, 1994; Jambor & Elliott, 2005). The words of the parents cited above reflect the influence of this perspective: “I ask my children not to speak sign language, so people won’t think I can’t hear. It’s awkward for me when they think I’m an idiot or retarded.”

Summary and Conclusions

Since this study is based on only twelve parents, generalizations are difficult. Nonetheless, it's hard to remain apathetic regarding the statements made by these deaf parents. Their childhood memories and parenting experiences reveal complex, difficult emotions. Evidently, despite repeated attempts to "normalize" deaf persons, they develop feelings all their own by grappling with deafness itself. Deaf parents report numerous communication difficulties in their families of origin, engendering experiences of detachment and isolation similar to those characterizing their relationships with their own hearing children. Likewise, the environment in which they were raised underestimated their capabilities in various areas of life, which may have also influenced their perception of themselves as parents. And finally, these parents speak of a strong sense of differentness and "otherness," often accompanied by feelings of deprivation, all of which affect their relationships with their children.

To what extent would more positive childhood memories generate different parenting experiences? To find out, deaf childrearing environment must change in several ways:

- (1) Communication – To avoid feelings of disconnection and isolation, all family members must be able to communicate fluently with each other. They must choose a communication channel that takes into account the uniqueness of the deaf child and enables him to express himself freely and understand what's said to him. One option preferred by deaf persons is sign language. All members of the family must learn this language as early as possible, and most of their communication in the deaf child's presence should be signed. Perhaps only then will he not feel alone and as if he doesn't belong. Similarly, perhaps if deaf persons grow up sensing that it's possible to communicate even with hearing people without feeling cut off, they'll communicate similarly, fluently, and intimately even with their own hearing children.
- (2) Capability – To foster deaf persons' faith in their abilities, they must be allowed to practice age-appropriate skills. Accordingly, both family and educational environments must be aware of what the deaf person can do despite his deafness, and they must therefore avoid restricting and overprotecting him. This way, deaf persons may develop higher self-images, which can also boost their parental confidence and contribute to effective and healthy parenting. Perhaps then we'll see less role reversal in families headed by deaf parents.

- (3) Differentness – What’s difficult for the deaf person is not the fact that he differs from the hearing but the fact that he perceives himself as inferior and worth less than others. Perhaps if his family, educational, and social environments accept his differentness rather than trying to “convert” him into a hearing person, he will more easily develop an appropriate identity and grow up with a sense of self-worth and pride rather than shame and inferiority. Then the deaf parent can “stand tall” even before his children, and they’ll manage not just to accept him as is but even to be proud of him!

Continued study of these questions, both academically and practically, is extremely important. Meanwhile deaf parents should be “heard” loud and clear, so everyone will “hear and know”!

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